TALES OF THE CHURCH IN ENGLAND

G. A. BURROWS

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Tales of the . . . Church in England

Boescus—A Tale of Roman Britain
"The Fury of the Heathen"
"Pro Ecclesia Dei"

BY

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PREFACE.

In introducing these short tales of English Church History, I have tried in every way to make the historical dates and the local colouring as correct as possible. In the last, I may explain that Hasted, in the *History of Kent*, states Bourne Episcopi was held by Archbishop Becket as part of the lands belonging to the See. It was natural to make the holder, tenant under him, a relative, though a purely imaginary person, as is the hero of the tale. Several authorities give the account of the banishment of Becket's relatives as part of the King's revenge.

Julius Vitalis, in the first tale, is, although also a creation, yet the son of a real person, whose memorial stone can be seen in Bath Museum by anyone. Christianity was not at the earliest computation in Britain then, but anyone coming from Rome, as the officials did, might have brought the "good news" with them, and Gaul certainly had itinerant Priests about then.

In the tale about Crowland, I am greatly indebted to a little pamphlet issued by the Vicar of the Abbey Church, as well as my personal knowledge of the locality. The Abbot Theodore is the only historical character of the tale.

G. E. BURROWS.

Beckenham,
October, 1904.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
BOESCUS—A TALE OF ROMAN BRITAIN	1
"THE FURY OF THE HEATHEN"	77
"PRO ECCLESIA DEI"	151

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

	FACING PAGE
BOESCUS AND GWYNNETH	15
BOESCUS AND JULIUS IN PRISON	71
THE BURNING OF THE ABBEY	102
ERIC, THE DANE	135
THE ARCHBISHOP AT PRAYER	159
WINDSOR CASTLE	204

BOESCUS,

A TALE OF ROMAN BRITAIN.

"It is the man who tries to make the best of both worlds, who makes nothing of either."—DRUMMOND.

BOESCUS,

A TALE OF ROMAN BRITAIN.

CHAPTER I.

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

SHAKESPEARE.

THE summer sun was shining down on the streets and temples of the Roman colony of Aqua-Solis, known now as Bath.

The town lay in the depths of its strange crater-like basin, the hills around were covered with dense wood, in which roamed many a wild beast and savage man. The atmosphere was rather like a vapour bath, but the sun-loving Romans basked in the heat, as they clustered together in this, one of the largest "colonia" in Britain. In strong relief to the glare of quivering light were the cool deep porches, and colonnades of the great Baths, built after the model of the celebrated Baths at Rome, with a hall for exercise, as well as baths of every size and gradation of heat. Here, in the porticoes, gathered philosophers, poets, logicians, and the officers of the Legion quartered at Aqua-Solis.

Beyond the Baths lay the Forum, and the temple of Sol-Minerva, the presiding goddess of the place.

One such blazing day, two young men were lounging at full length on couches, drinking the wine made from the grapes, whose vines covered the adjacent hill-sides. Both were resting after the bath, it was getting on for supper time, a meal served with great magnificence, and a bath was a usual preparation for it. The pair talked together in a very friendly fashion, as if relations were very harmonious between them. One was a slender, dark-haired, thin-faced young man of five-and-twenty, the other a very tall, broad-shouldered young giant, with fair curling hair, and intensely blue eyes. Although so anomalous in look, both wore the dress of centurions in the Imperial Army. The first was Julius Vitalis, Roman on his mother's side, but the son of a Belgic Gaul, another Julius Vitalis, smith of the Twentieth Legion, in which his son was now centurion. The other was Boescus, native of Southern Britain, and adopted brother to Julius. He had been taken, a wailing baby of twelve months, from his dead mother, who lay with a javelin in her heart. The tribe, the Cantii, had been slain, made prisoners, or escaped, and Boescus had been adopted by his preserver, Julius Vitalis, and for twenty-four of his twenty-five years of life, had lived the regular Roman fashion, in opinions, habits, and tastes, and he wished for nothing else. He, like his adopted brother, had entered the Twentieth Legion, and had risen to the rank he now held. They had always lived

near Aqua-Solis; Julius Vitalis, the smith, who was apparently rather in the same position as the Master of a City company, had died at the early age of twenty-nine, leaving his own son and his adopted son to the care of his wife. They were but three years of age, and they lived a sturdy happy boyhood on the slopes of the hills, where nestled the little villa taken by Julius Vitalis for his wife. But the brothers grew up, and when the mother died the villa was parted with, as both were soldiers.

This day they were talking over the new sect, the Christians, of which they had heard. There was no consolidated Church yet in Britain, in this year of our LORD 76, but there were scattered over the land soldiers and civilians who had learnt the Truth, and practised "strange arts."

"As well say that this temple," burst out Julius Vitalis at last, waving his hand to that of Minerva, close by, "can be never destroyed, as that a faith in a crucified man, a traitor to the Empire, could succeed. But there! the sun shows the supper hour is near. Where dost thou sup to-night, Boescus?"

"With Marcus Valerius, at his new villa. He has had marble brought from Carrara," replied Boescus, rising to his magnificent height.

"By Jupiter! I wonder how it is done," said Julius, lazily. "Well, *I* am bound to the lady Lucia's. Any commands for the fair Caia?" he added, looking up mischievously.

Boescus grew a dark red. "None," he answered, and strode off. Julius watched him across the

sunlit space, towering above the rest, a goodly sight in his white tunic, bright cuirass, and eagle helmet, carrying the gold wand, the sign of his rank.

"He is barbarian still in speech," thought Julius, "but true as steel."

Meanwhile Boescus tramped off rather sulkily. Caia was a sore point with him; he wanted to win her, but her mother, Lucia, wife to Lucanus, the ædile, had ambitions for her eldest daughter far above a native Briton, even if a naturalized Roman and a citizen. Caia was of very pure Latin descent, but born in Britain, and she dearly loved the green trees, and free country of her native land. This in itself was an attraction to the Briton, for under his Latinism was the intense love of his country that seems the heritage of Britain's sons now. So he walked on in a sullen, half-angry, half-dejected mood. A knot of people made him pause, and he heard part of a conversation, in somewhat broken Latin. The speaker was an elderly man, in the dress of a poor worker. The words arrested Boescus' attention:

"Here we have no continuing city,"—and then Boescus lost the rest. What it meant he could not tell: he mused over it till he reached the splendid new villa just built by Marcus Valerius.

However, the good food, wine, song, laughter, and jest effaced the impression made, but, at the usual libation to the gods, one guest quietly omitted the ceremony. He was a sedate-looking man of forty, in the dress of a high civil officer, and a stranger

to those present. Marcus Valerius strained forward on his couch saying, "Come, Aulus! follow the custom."

"I cannot, kinsman," answered Aulus, firmly.

"Cannot! how now, it matters not if thou believest in the gods, but the custom must be followed. Perchance thou wast asleep?" said Marcus, half sarcastically.

"Nay, but I am a Christian," answered Aulus, quietly.

The guests stared: some laughed indulgently, and Marcus said airily, "Oh! that is well said. Come, tell us, there are strange things told of thy GOD."

Aulus looked round; every face was turned to him, with curiosity or amusement, save one, that of Boescus. He wore a look of intense interest.

"I will tell you—all of you," said Aulus, in his clear, distinct voice, and pure Latin. "We worship but one GOD."

"Then give thy libation to Him. It matters not which god thou choosest," put in Marcus, laughing.

"I cannot," again said Aulus.

"Well! go on. 'Tis only like the Jews as yet," said one guest, impatiently.

Aulus raised himself more on his elbow, and went on, "He, our GOD, came down on earth as a Baby."

"Nay, a god would not do this," expostulated one.

"Dost thou not say the gods walked the earth as men once? Our GOD was Man too: He taught for three years in Jerusalem, and Judea, and then

Pontius Pilatus condemned Him to death for rebellion against Cæsar."

"Rebellion?" queried Boescus.

"So the Jews said, and Pilatus dared not release Him. He died."

"Not much of a god. Is it true He was crucified?" asked Marcus.

"Yes," but how differently the answer came with its ring of triumph. "He *was* crucified. They buried Him in a garden-sepulchre, and Pilatus set a watch. The guard, on the third morning, were startled by the appearance of beings like lesser gods. The stone in front of the sepulchre had gone, and the Christus had come forth alive."

"Alive! Man, thou *art* mad," cried Marcus.

"My father was officer of the watch: thou knowest, Marcus, he was at Jerusalem then."

"I have heard it. Go on, thy tale is wondrous," said Marcus.

"He, the Christus, was alive again. He taught many things there, chiefly that we have another life beyond this one."

"Where?" asked Boescus, eagerly.

"Above. Life does not end in nothingness; we live on a grander, better life."

Aulus paused, and there was silence. To some it was a fantastic tale; to others a legend, possibly founded on a truth; to one it was a revelation of an expansion of life and its aims, of which he had had no conception, and that one was Boescus.

At last Marcus Valerius spoke in words, used by

another Roman not long before: "Truly, Aulus, almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. It has a marvellously attractive seeming."

"Aye, it was meant for slaves, not for educated men," sneered one of those present.

"It is for *all*," said Aulus Valerius, emphatically.

"Well, well!" said Marcus, in that tone of patronizing reassurance meant to push away his own thoughts. "Take thy way, kinsman, and leave us ours. One more cup, friends. To Minerva-Solis, and may the great goddess ever deign to guard our city."

That night, under the fitful starlight of our changeful summer, Boescus and Aulus Valerius walked back into Aqua-Solis, to which Aulus had just come in a civil capacity, from the sunny slopes of Italy. Boescus had not his curricle, he had chosen to go on foot to his feast. Aulus asked him presently his name.

"Boescus Vitalis," answered he, giving the patronymic he always used.

"Are thou of Latin race?" asked Aulus, thinking it almost unlikely, with the young man's colouring and build.

"No, I am a Briton," answered Boescus, shortly.

"A Briton!" and Aulus looked at his companion in intense surprise.

"Yes; I was adopted as a mere babe by Julius Vitalis. But what are these strange tales thou hast told us? Did thy GOD do as thou saidst?"

"Aye, He did," was the steady answer.

"My father's people taught the necessity of human sacrifice, to propitiate the gods," said Boescus, dreamily. "But we Romans believe in ——."

He hesitated; he could not say honestly he accepted the Roman pantheism, and now there was a craving to believe something. This man Aulus seemed to have a reserve force, which was very fascinating.

"We Romans believe in Jupiter the great, in Diana, in Minerva here. Ah! Boescus, in believing in many, thou believest in none," said Aulus, half sadly.

"But one GOD! Surely thy GOD doest not small things, but He has secondary deities, like Jupiter?" said Boescus, slowly,

"GOD does *all* things. He made us; He made this little insect," holding out his hand, on which had lighted a tiny moth.

"Then thou sayest He died. A god does not die."

"As GOD He could not die. But He gave up His power as GOD to die as Man."

"But crucifixion is the death for slaves," objected Boescus.

"He took upon Him the form of a slave, as Man, and He died the usual death of a slave, to save the world."

"To save the world!" repeated Boescus, puzzled. "Why should He do it?"

"Because the world is sinful, and He loved those whom He had created."

Boescus gave a deep sigh, and stood still. "We part here," he said; "I must see thee again."

"Any time thou wilt find me near the northern gate; ask for Aulus Valerius at the Villa Superbus. Farewell."

Boescus went home in a state of great perplexity. He and Julius had a villa together, and Julius was already at home.

"Well, Boescus, are the pillars Carrarian marble?" he asked as Boescus entered the inner court, in which he lay dozing.

"I did not see," answered Boescus, slowly.

"Not see! by Minerva! what caused thee *not* to see? A fair lady, who liked thy blue eyes?" laughed Julius, stretching himself.

The said blue eyes opened rather wider, as Boescus answered, "There were no ladies, Julius."

"Then thou art bewitched, or turned Christian. I heard at supper they were sorcerers. They eat the flesh of babes, and have secret horrible rites."

"Who told thee?" asked Boescus, calmly.

"The lady Lucia. She says her daughter's slave is a Christian.

"Whose? The fair Caia?" stammered Boescus.

"Ah! thou art roused *now*. Even so, my brother. Caia looked well to-night, Boescus."

There was a teasing ring in Julius' voice which irritated Boescus, perplexed as he already was. He drew himself up with a sudden passionate gesture. "The lady Caia always looks well," he said, haughtily.

"Well enough! There are others I prefer; a blue-eyed, golden-haired maiden, a country woman of thine, for instance," answered Julius, lazily.

The mischievously implied disparagement of Caia, and the reference to his own birth, fired the Briton's slow blood. "I am as much a Roman as thou art," he thundered. "Thou art but of Belgic birth."

Julius Vitalis looked up; perhaps the touch of Northern blood in his veins made him philosophical, for he only said, "Why get excited? We are true brothers, although thou mayst be of chieftain blood, and I but the son of the smith of the Twentieth Legion.

Was it accident that made Boescus look up just then?

Through the colonnade he could see out to a mound, where, clear in the moonlight, he could see a dying wretch of a slave, crucified. There flashed across the mind of the young centurion the words he had heard: "He took the form of a slave, and was crucified to save us all."

To Julius' utter surprise, he simply turned on his heel, and walked off without a word.

CHAPTER II.

"Each giving to the other's need,
Each helping on the other's best."
BROWNING.

BOESCUS had apparently, by the next day, forgotten his most unusual passion, and he went about his work and pleasure in his ordinary, calm, business-like fashion. He was training diligently for some games to be held soon, and the hardy, vigorous nature inherited from his British ancestry made him a general favourite in all athletic contests. A day or two later he was leaving the gymnasium, when he was arrested by a soft call from a litter just passing, borne by four stalwart negro slaves. He knew the voice, and the face that looked out between the half-drawn curtains. It was a dark-haired girl of eighteen with a soft tint of colour on her oval face, already much admired in Aqua-Solis, and dressed simply in white. She was Caia, the eldest daughter of Caius Lucanus, the ædile.

"Thou hast not been to us lately, Boescus," she said, softly.

"Didst thou need me, fair lady?" asked he, a thrill of intense joy passing over him.

"I did. I have somewhat to ask of thee," she answered, colouring.

"Ask on," he said, abruptly, his taciturn speech veiling far from cool feelings.

"'Tis this. I have a slave, a faithful nurse, who has lived with me all my life. She is a Briton, and now my mother wishes her to go away, to Gaul."

"Why is this, fair Caia?" asked Boescus, astonished, for slaves were generally a fixture.

"She tells me of things they say are blasphemy to the gods. She believes not in them."

"What am *I* to do?" asked Boescus, bluntly.

"She will die if she leaves Britain, my poor old Gwynneth; I know not who to ask, but thee, to aid her, Boescus."

Her voice quivered, and his was not quite steady, as he replied, "Aught to serve thee, fair lady, is pure pleasure."

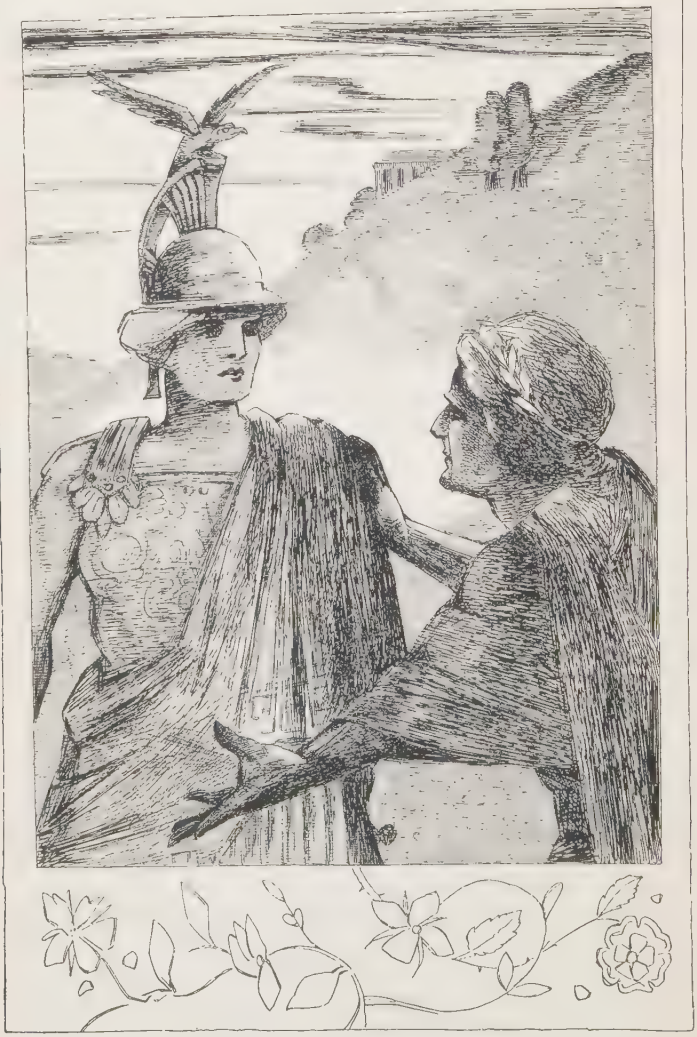
She looked confused, but went on, "*I* love this land; my father hates it. Gwynneth can only stay if she is purchased."

"And, that is all thou needest? Gladly will I do this, and Gwynneth shall be free," cried he.

"Free! Thou wilt manumit her! Oh, Boescus, thou are generous!" said Caia, with tears in her eyes.

"She is one of ourselves," said Boescus, proudly, and rather sadly. "No Briton but would free a Briton, at least now."

"I—forget thou art a Briton, save for thy appearance. I—love the land, and the people are noble. But farewell, Boescus, and my grateful thanks."



BOESCUS AND GWYNNETH.

"Gwynneth stood solemnly before him, a commanding figure, with her loose grey hair and toil-worn face. She put out one hand."

Page 15.

The litter moved off, leaving Boescus standing speechless in the street, the sun beating down on his uncovered head as he gazed after her.

Four days later he became the purchaser of Gwynneth for a ridiculously high figure, and he instantly went through the necessary process to set her free. He had a long talk with her, in the course of which he asked where she came from.

"I was born in the Cantii country, close to where the colony of Cantium is. Twenty years ago I was taken prisoner."

"Of the Cantii! So am I!" cried Boescus.

"Who art thou, then? Art thou not of the Vitalis?" cried Gwynneth.

"Nay. Twenty-four years ago I was taken from my dead mother, a wailing babe, and adopted by Julius Vitalis. I was but a year old. My name is Boesca: a dying man, stretched by my mother, whispered it, but died ere he could tell more. Who am I, then?" asked the young man, eagerly.

Gwynneth stood solemnly before him, a commanding figure, with her loose grey hair and toil-worn face. She put out one hand. "Son of the Chief Elsca, and now head of the Cantii," she said.

Boescus sprang up: all the blood of his wild, free ancestry was tingling, his eyes flashing like blue steel. "Head of the Cantii!" he cried. "Where are they?"

"Scattered," said Gwynneth, sadly. "Well I remember thy mother's death; I was away at another fort."

"My father?" gasped Boescus, breathlessly.

"Was killed fighting for his family and home. Thy brothers, older than thou, were killed also."

Boescus' brow grew dark, and he involuntarily looked down at his splendid Roman dress and equipments. "And I alone am left," he said, after a pause.

"Of the chief's kin. Thy mother was beautiful, fair and stately. My lady Caia loved the stories of my life in the wattled forts, as the Romans chased us from one to the other."

"She loves this land," said Boescus, colouring.

"She is a true woman, she pities the weaker side, and is ever kind to them."

Boescus passed his hand over his eyes. "The gods be with her," he murmured, softly.

"Thou lovest her, but thou wilt not win her. Lucanus hates thee, and he hates this land."

Boescus took a rapid turn across the court, and then came back. "Thinkest thou she loves me?" he asked, hoarsely.

Gwynneth looked at him a moment. "Yea!" she answered, "she *does* love thee, but she is to wed thy adopted brother, Julius Vitalis, ere long."

"By Jupiter! she shall not. Julius loves her not; I am as rich as he is; I bear rank as Roman; I am a citizen, even if my birth be barbarian. There! leave me, Gwynneth. Here is gold for thee, thou art free to go where thou wilt. Come again soon—and tell me—of her. Go! go!"

Every sentence was gasped out in greater difficulty, as Boescus endeavoured to conceal from the woman his agony at her news. Gwynneth looked sadly at his white face, with the great drops wetting the mass of fair curls on his brow, and she obeyed his authoritative gesture, with a solemn "Farewell, and may GOD grant thee thy heart's desire."

"Art thou still training, Boescus?" asked Julius, as he found his brother striding up and down the court furiously. Boescus paused, looking at the easy-going, luxurious young soldier critically; in his breastplate of shining metal, inlaid with gold; his helmet with a golden crest; his short white tunic, bordered with a key pattern; and his scarf, the last remains of the toga; truly he was a fine specimen of a conquering race. And Boescus wore the same white tunic but with no armour, and his massive arms showed grandly out of his short sleeves.

"What is wrong with thee?" asked Julius, laughingly, "art lovesick? I have a request from Aulus Valerius to sup to-morrow at his villa. Christian, as men say he is, I am curious to see how he can give a banquet. Wilt thou come?"

Boescus nodded; he was glad to go, to make a change of thought from that which now surged through his brain.

"Boescus, thou art not thyself," said Julius, rather anxiously.

"No! I know who I am now," said Boescus, slowly.

"Boescus Vitalis, centurion of the Twentieth Legion, art thou not?" asked Julius, surprised at the suddenness of the change in the conversation.

"That is so now, but what was I born to?"

"Born to! Born in Britain, of the Cantii; we knew that before," said Julius, still puzzled.

"I was born son of the head of the tribe, and am hereditary chief now," answered Boescus.

"May thy chieftainship bring thee good luck," said Julius, carelessly flinging himself on a couch. "Personally, I should not mind, for thou art a Roman; but thou couldst never lead their life, and thy tribe is scattered; nor couldst thou have the lady Caia then," he added, looking up with a twinkle of amusement, at his tall companion.

Boescus frowned. "That is naught anyway," he answered, gloomily, "she could not wed a Briton. Dost thou love her, my brother?" he added, turning suddenly on his astonished brother.

"I! By all the gods, no! Where gettest thou that monstrous figment into thy brain?" cried Julius.

"I was told just now by Gwynneth, *her* slave, whom I have bought of Lucanus, and manumitted."

"What! the Christian witch, thou didst buy to please Caia. Truly, she might have read the stars to better purpose. Nay, my brother," and Julius' voice dropped to an unusually earnest tone, "I never had a wish to wed but one, and she is wed, far away in Gaul. The gods be with her! Bah! Caia will have thee, the fates fortell it."

He finished with an airy laugh, as if daring the emotion he had previously shown.

"Would it were so," sighed Boescus. "Julius, thou wentest on the embassy to South Britain; what is it like?"

"Green hills, broad rivers, forests, fair women, strong men like all this land," said Julius, yawning lazily.

"I wish I knew——," began Boescus.

But Julius interposed, "Come, search not for the unknown. But, Boescus, there go the trumpets, it is the ninth hour."

The next day they both repaired to the villa now taken by Aulus Valerius, who was a thoroughly well-born Roman, and knew how to entertain. Slaves received them, presenting them with fresh flowers. Then they were ushered into the banquet, the tables being beautifully decorated, the couches on which the guests reclined easy and soft. About twenty guests were present. Oysters from Richborough, fish from the river, the flesh of the wild boar, beef, and various kinds of birds were handed round by white-clad servants. After that came fruit, and varied sorts of preparations of sweet things. The omission of the libation was, of course, noticed, but tolerated in these days, and in this distant province. Aulus kept the conversation going, not hiding his opinions, but in not any degree obtruding them unnecessarily. Julius Vitalis was quite satisfied that his host could entertain, and he proceeded to enjoy himself. His happy, careless face was in

direct contrast to the heavy air of gloom worn by Boescus. Truth to tell, it had a very mundane reason. Lucanus was present, and very decidedly turning the cold shoulder on the Briton, and very polite to Julius. Boescus was by nature and present mood likely to resent this, for under his Roman polish lay the dogged passion of his race, not quickly roused, but hard to soothe. Aulus watched his moody, preoccupied air, as he leant on one arm, his fair hair crowned with a wreath, his big blue eyes staring vacantly before him, save when some direct speech brought them in a lightning flash to his questioner's face.

"Art ill, Boescus?" asked one.

"Nay, he is bewitched," put in another, mischievously. The whole of the city knew his fascination for Caia.

"Nay, friends!" said Aulus, pleasantly, seeing the lion was being poked up too much. "If our Boescus needs to be left alone, I prithee let him be. Here is Caius with a fine tale, he will tell it to us."

Caius, a merry, quick little man, was always willing to tell a good story, and soon the guests were in roars over this tale. Aulus got a few words with Boescus ere they parted. "Is all well with thee?" he asked.

"All is wrong. I am discontent with my life, I know nothing, but feel——," said Boescus, pausing in his words. "I was happy," he went on, "now I cannot go back, yet I loathe this unrest."

"Come and see me to-morrow. We will talk over things," said Aulus, kindly, as he turned to other guests.

"I will come," said Boescus, and he said his *adieux*, going away somewhat cheered, for he really was anxious to know more of this Christian sect, and perhaps it would make him forget Caia, or help to win her. He had not the slightest idea of the *real* meaning of the Faith.

CHAPTER III.

"More,
The battle's loss may profit those who lose,
Than victory advantage those who win."

CALDERON.

AULUS kept his word, and Boescus Vitalis had more opportunities of conversation. It was well that the engrossing subject was of such vital importance as to absorb him, for Lucanus practically ignored him, and Caia only turned appealing, piteous glances at him whenever they met. There was, however, in the Briton's mind a something that kept him grave and quiet, indeed, but neither sullen nor raging at these constant checks. Rumours, and *more* than rumours, were abroad of a western, or southern rising, and Boescus longed to prove his arms by fighting. He had never, as yet, had any to speak of in his five years' service. He had not to wait long: September saw the southern tribes up, and messengers were calling together the Legions. The call came to Aqua-Solis, and Julius Vitalis and Boescus were sent with their 200 men to Londinium. They had, or Boescus had, no time for any farewells, but as he and Julius rode away together on the broad road they turned back to look at the city in which both had spent the greater part of their lives,

not then a wilderness of slate roofs, but dazzling in white stone and marble, the stately pile of buildings of temple, Baths, and Forum in the midst.

"Shall we ever come back? If not, I wonder where we shall be?" said Julius, with unusual gravity.

Boescus said nothing, but he thought of the instructions he had received lately, and of the little meeting of Christians he had been at, as a catechumen, only two days before.

However, Julius recovered himself, with a gay laugh, saying, "Anyhow, that is a fair city, and I expect to come back. I sent word to Caia thou and I were going."

"I owe thee thanks, brother," answered Boescus, a shadow crossing his face. Much had he longed to see the girl again, but pride and forbearance to her had struggled with that longing, and had conquered.

They rode on quickly through the wild country, keeping always to the road, for all round was forest and marsh and heath. At Durocina they crossed the river, and diverging at a spot ten miles south-west of Londinium they made an encampment, joining a portion of another Legion, formed from the Abulchi, in Spain, and quartered at Anderida. The tribune commanding this was a tall, dignified, handsome man, whose courteous stateliness and dark swarthy colouring were in odd contrast to Boescus' rosy fairness, or Julius' slight, active, slender face and figure. However, the officers and men fraternised, and song and feasting reigned round the

watch fires, only under the clear September stars the steel-clad sentries stood, watching from the heights now densely populated. One of these sentries stood overlooking the valley of Tameisis, the river rushing, bubbling, foaming over its rocky, shallow bed. Great forests swept westward, the haunt of wolf, boar, and deer, and of the enemy. The sentry was a Gaul, but his individuality was merged into his military training. He stood leaning on his spear, his eyes wandering over the dark woodland, not unlike his native place, on the wooded slopes of the Vosges mountains.

Suddenly a voice said, "Art thou watching well, Diovicus?" and Boescus stood by him. "There! thou art not to blame," he went on kindly, seeing Diovicus looked confused, "but remember we help to guard Londinium by our presence here."

Boescus turned away as the soldier saluted, but he had not moved far before a cry made him look round quickly. He saw the sentry fall, and as he rushed to his side he raised his bugle to his lips and the alarm notes rang out. Still all was quiet, yet the javelin through the young soldier's heart was proof of a yet unseen foe. Another javelin hurtled through the air, and in another second a desperate, white-clad host burst up the hill to meet the one man who stood there. His blue eyes blazed with the same fire as theirs as he stood holding his own for a time. Soon the well-trained soldiers hurled themselves on the Britons, and they retired, leaving many dead. No one of the legionaries was killed,

save for the sentry, and where was the centurion Boescus Vitalis? Generally it was believed he was in another part of the camp, but a very short inspection served to get rid of that idea. Julius, however, on returning to the scene of the conflict, picked up a piece of a gold chain, of which he knew every link. It gave a proof of what his foreboding soul had guessed: that Boescus was a prisoner, and, if not killed at once, reserved for the worse fate of torture, *i.e.*, sacrifice to appease the wrath of the gods. Julius was in terrible grief; careless, luxurious, as he was, he cared for Boescus as if they had been the brothers in blood they were in adoption. All night long he strode up and down, devising impossible plans of rescue. But morning light brought wiser, and cooler counsel. Sullenly and passively he drew off his men, under the tribune, to Londinium, from whence he sent a letter to Caia, telling her of Boescus' capture.

"Julius Vitalis, to the lady Caia, greeting.

"This is to tell thee, fair lady, what I know will sadden thee. My brother is captive to the enemy, during a night attack. Lady, thou didst know him, I think thou lovest him, so I write this unto thee. He is lost for ever, for I will not tell thee what the Britons do to prisoners, it would but frighten thee. My heart and my words alike fail me in this grief.

"Thy devoted servant,

"JULIUS VITALIS.

"*At Londinium.*"

And where *was* Boescus? Not twenty miles away, in the fastnesses of the forests. He had fainted from loss of blood, and had been carried rapidly to the rear, and laid behind some bushes, well bound. He was stripped of his armour and weapons, and his wounds, merely flesh wounds, attended to. With his white tunic, his fair colouring gave him the strongest resemblance to his captors. He was not treated badly, but hurried through tortuous paths for a considerable distance. It must have been some miles, for the autumn dawn was breaking as they arrived in a broad glade, surrounded with rough huts. Into one of these he was thrust, and left alone. Presently the skin screen over the doorway was pushed aside, and a girl stood there in a coarse blue mantle, carrying a bowl of milk. She smiled, and pointed: she knew no Latin, and he would not risk the smattering he had of the sort of general dialect used by most tribes. He made a sign his hands were bound, and she held the bowl to his lips. He drank thirstily: his wounds, if not severe, were very irritating, and he was parched. The girl smiled again, and left him, and the young man fell asleep till the sun was high. Then he was roused, and escorted to a glade, where, under a huge tree, sat an old man with a white beard. He wore a long white mantle, a glittering javelin leant up by him, and a fine dog lay at his feet. He surveyed his prisoner with curiosity; tall as his guards were, Boescus towered above them, white as death from loss of blood, a

streak of crimson across his forehead mingling with the yellow hair, unarmed, utterly helpless, yet his blue eyes gazed calmly into those confronting him.

"Thou art a Roman?" asked the old chief, in fair Latin.

"I am a centurion of the Twentieth Legion," answered Boescus, quietly.

"Thy name, O centurion?"

"Boescus Vitalis."

"Thou dost not *look* a Roman," went on the old man, sententiously.

"I am *not* a native of Rome, but I am a free citizen, and I serve the Emperor."

"To all but Britons we have vowed extermination. We keep not prisoners, we offer them to our gods to appease their wrath."

Boescus shuddered, then, seeing the old man was looking for such a manifestation, he said, calmly, "I fear not death in any form. It is but the entrance to a new life."

The last sentence came to his lips, and he felt he *must* speak the words.

"Not fear death? Well, I give thee life if thou tellest me of the Legions, where they are, and their numbers."

Boescus folded his arms, now unbound, and looked at the chief. "Chief," he said, "wilt thou betray thy people?"

"Nay."

"Do the Britons betray each other? Methinks not."

No answer, so Boescus went on: "I was born in Britain, of the Cantii, but I will *not* betray my trust."

"Of the Cantii! Then why dost thou fight against us?"

"I was taken from my dead mother as a babe, and brought up by Romans."

"Well, thou art free if thou wilt join us and fight for thy country."

The chief fully expected an agreement to these terms. He was considerably astonished when Boescus looked him full in the face, saying, "I cannot. My oath binds me."

"Thy oath! To invaders! I give thee freedom, or imprisonment with blinded eyes, for we cannot kill a Briton, and we *dare* not let thee see our movements. Choose for thyself."

For one moment Boescus looked up at the azure sky, soft and hazy with autumn; at the trees in their many tints, at the golden brown and green fern, and at the sunshine, and he hesitated. Freedom meant the power to enjoy every moment of his young manhood and splendid strength; it meant the power to fight, to hunt, to love, aye, and to serve the Empire. The alternative meant a dragging out of life in solitary darkness, a captive, or (the best end to it) a torturing death on any caprice of his cruel jailers. No wonder he paused, while a death-like silence betokened that even these men realised the struggle going on. But as Boescus paused there flashed into his mind words he had heard said at his first Christian meeting: "Lead us

not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." They were but a sudden flash, but they decided him. He faced the chief, saying boldly, though the drops still stood on his brow with the effort, "Chief, I dare not break my oath, except I denied the Faith by holding to it. In this do as thou wilt."

The chief respected courage, although he was very angry, so he made one more attempt. "Thou art young, maybe thou lovest."

Boescus' face changed.

"Ah! thou dost. Well, see! thou shalt soon be happy, we *shall* cast out the effete Roman, and regain our land."

In all the young man's misery he half smiled at the utter vanity of that notion.

"I would help thee, Boescus Vitalis," went on the chief; "thou art a Briton, we cannot have a binding oath with a Roman."

Boescus' eyes flashed a strange light on the nonplussed chief, as he said, "A Briton *can* be true to his oath, and *I* will be true to mine, in life or death."

"Then thy doom is certain. Take him hence, and bind him well. To-morrow, at even, we will darken his eyes."

When Boescus was alone the strain gave way, and he broke down miserably.

At sunset the same girl brought him milk and stewed kid, of which he was glad, primitive as was the cooking. Then he slept, worn out with misery. Next day he was dragged through miles of country,

by rough paths, to a settlement under the downs on the borders of Hampshire. There for weeks he remained guarded, made to perform menial tasks, yet happy in that his eyes were safe.

Chance of escape he had none as yet, although his clothes being only a coarse blue tunic and skin mantle, he looked far more like his captors than a Roman soldier.

CHAPTER IV.

"The one joy of doing kindnesses."
GEORGE HERBERT.

ONE bitterly cold day in December, Boescus Vitalis, centurion of the Twentieth Legion, was engaged on the weariful task of collecting wood and heather through the snow for the fires of the settlement. He was watched by two or three children and dogs, and he well knew if he attempted escape, the latter would soon follow him, although the men were nearly all away. The tribe were of the Belgæ, utterly hostile to Rome. Boescus, six feet four in height, found stooping after sticks and brushwood very hard work, but he endured it with a quiet, patient philosophy. Presently a slight girlish figure slipped from behind an oak, and laid a hand on his arm. It was Asdua, the girl whom he had seen when first taken. She was granddaughter to the chief, in whose household Boescus lived practically as a slave. All the comforts he got were of Asdua's providing.

"Boesca," she said, using the native form of his name, "come hither," and she drew him into a tangle of bushes. "Listen!" she went on, "a messenger has come; there has been a battle: the

Romans have conquered. The Druids say it is because *thou* art alive. Next full moon thou wilt be sacrificed to appease the gods."

One pair of blue eyes looked up into others as blue, but gleaming with a steely light.

"So be it," answered Boescus, "a soldier can but die once."

She looked up at him with intensest worship: his refined courtesy was so different from the rough barbarian ways of her tribe. "Thou dost not fear death?" she said, timidly.

"No soldier does. Besides, there *is* more to come."

Captivity had caused Boescus to think over his scanty knowledge of the Christian Faith, and practically he acted up to his knowledge. Of theories he knew little as yet, the bare plain truth was all he had mastered, specially as to the future state, which chimed in so well with so much of the better Latin writers, and of even the philosophy taught to those of Roman birth or education.

"Wouldst thou not escape death?" asked the girl, with a little half-puzzled look.

"Escape it! Yes, certainly, if possible," he said.

"Then hearken to me. Be cutting wood for me, or they will suspect us."

He obeyed, tearing down some dead branches. She came round, and spoke very low.

"To-night there is no moon, I can save thee. When the lights are out, I will leave a bundle of wood at thy door. In it there will be food, and a white

cloak just as our warriors wear. At dawn start, before then the wolves would have thee. Over there," pointing north-east, "is some of the Roman Army. No Briton will molest thee, if thou comest from the Belgæ."

Boescus' eyes flashed.

"Asdua!" he cried, "I thank thee for life and liberty. This settlement shall be spared."

"I do not this for reward," she said, hurriedly, looking nervously round, anywhere but into the face of the man she was sending from her.

He looked down at her shrinking form, and said gravely, "The lady I love will thank thee too, Asdua. She is far away in Aqua-Solis, and knows not if I be alive or dead," he added, with a sigh.

Asdua asked, with a certain curiosity, "Is she beautiful?"

"Perhaps not to thine eyes. She has not yellow hair like *we* have, but she has long dark hair like the sheen on a raven's wing. Dark eyes like yonder pool for clear depth; skin like a soft white cloud touched with sunset glow; and a voice sweet and musical as the wind in the firs."

Boescus ran on in his rhapsody, not noticing the tears in the girl's eyes as she realised her vast inferiority to her unconscious rival.

"Thou lovest her well?" she murmured.

"Indeed, yes, but I cannot win her yet. She is born of a free Roman house: *I* am a barbarian."

"*Thou* a barbarian!" she said, with such evident surprise that he laughed.

"Thou knowest not the world, fair one. But thou must not linger. I thank thee, Asdua," he said, bending to kiss the lips she put up to his in childish fashion. She was but a forest maid of fifteen.

"Ah, Roman slave!" cried a voice, and Boescus drew himself up to meet the angry gaze of a young man in a soiled, white dress, covered with a skin mantle. He carried a spear, and a short Roman sword, the spoil of some foray. Behind him were half-a-dozen men, all weary, one or two slightly wounded. This was Cornach, nephew and heir to the chief, and Asdua's lover.

"Ah, slave!" he cried again, "how dost thou dare to speak to my Asdua?"

"'Twas nothing, Cornach, "said the girl, timidly, while Boescus stood silent, not daring to speak, lest he should betray his intense anger.

"Nothing!" laughed Cornach, "deserter of thy race. Next full moon will see thy desertion revenged," and dealing a blow at Boescus, which missed him, Cornach hurried Asdua away, followed by his limping, hungry men.

All Boescus' hot blood was up at the insults, but he knew for the sake of escape he must keep quiet. More gladly than ever, he, at the right time, found the wood, and took it into his own sod-and-wattle hut. It was icy cold, with the wind howling through the cracks, but Boescus did not heed that. He found some barley cakes, and the promised garment. At dawn he crept out of his hut, it was freezingly cold, and no one was stirring. It was a terrible

journey; when the sun was up it was brighter and better, but he went on wearily at last. He was getting sleepy too, but he dared not stop for sleep. He stumbled along, keeping somewhat in the right direction, till the familiar sound of a Roman trumpet roused him. With renewed energy he made for the sound, and soon came on a deserted fort, in which a party was camping. The sentry challenged him, and he returned a satisfactory reply.

"Who commands here?" he asked.

"Julius Vitalis, centurion of the Twentieth Legion," was the answer.

"Thou art Marcus Ligones?" went on the seeming Briton, quietly.

The young Gaul stared; he was a native of Ligones, but was commonly known as Marcus.

"*Who* art thou?" he stammered. "Ah! most noble centurion, thou!"

"Yes; now admit me, Marcus."

Boescus made his way to the large rough hut occupied by the officers. There were three present: two sat drinking and eating, the other (and by his dress Boescus knew who it was) sat moodily staring into the fire. "My search is useless. None can tell me of him," he said, suddenly rising, and as the red glow shone on his face Boescus saw how careworn that face had become.

"Doubtless Boescus is dead," said one of the others, in a would-be consolatory tone.

"I fear so," sighed Julius. "That old man said he was taken nearer the hills. I dare not take any

men from here, now we guard this place. I would go alone, were it possible.

"Art *mad*, Julius Vitalis? Come, man, it was no blood relationship, after all. He may have joined the Britons," said the other centurion, a sneering-looking man, half a Greek.

"I stake my life on my brother's truth," said Julius, with a little blaze of anger. "Whoever says not, must answer *me*."

"Well answered, Julius Vitalis," said Boescus, stalking into the firelight. They all started up: a powerful Briton was a startling spectacle.

"Who art thou?" stammered Julius.

"Boescus Vitalis, late centurion of the Twentieth Legion, and sworn soldier, and citizen of the Empire," answered Boescus, emphatically, by which they knew he had overheard the previous remarks.

"My brother!" gasped Julius, springing forward to seize him.

"I have been in captivity, nigh to death," said Boescus, whilst he greeted the other two.

"Sit and eat, Boescus, then tell us," said Julius, pressing him on to a seat. So Boescus sat down to the first good meal he had had since September. Question after question the other two plied him with, till at last they left the brothers alone. Then Boescus looked up. "So thou trusted me, Julius?" he said.

"Of a truth, yes," said Julius, bluntly. Something seemed to choke him, as he tried to speak.

"What hast thou done, these long days, eh?"

asked Boescus, with a laugh, which perhaps had as much strong feeling in it as tears.

"Fight, and watch, and weary for tidings of thee."

"And hast thou heard of her, the lady Caia. Is she well?" said Boescus, after a long pause.

Julius sprang up, saying hastily, "Thou art worn out. Hear no more tales to-night."

Boescus rose too, laying his powerful hand on his brother, compelling him to turn round. The expression told him the news he was to hear was not good. He said slowly, "What is it, Julius? Is she wed?"

"No." Julius could not wrench himself free from his brother's firm hold.

Boescus looked at him a moment, his eyes growing more steely, and he said, "Not dead—not that?"

The tone of agony went to the other's heart, and he nodded silently. Boescus loosed his hold, and staggered back against the wall, where he stood shaking from head to foot. "Not dead?" he said, hoarsely.

"Yes."

"When?"

"Not many days, I had the news. She—we—thought you were dead. She pined till she died. Gwynneth tended her: she died in your faith."

"Dead! Caia dead! No; it's not true, it's not true," whispered Boescus.

"It is true," said Julius, simply.

Boescus flung up his arms with a mad ringing laugh. "Ah!" he cried. "So Caia is mine. Briton

though I am, she is mine in the new Life. Why not begin it now?" The roving wild eyes were searching for a weapon, and he went on talking. "Yes; that proud Roman can never stop my Caia being mine now. She is a Christian, I am one soon, then we will be wed. Julius, my brother, wilt thou come to the feast?"

Boescus again clutched his brother, towering above him, and swaying like a drunken man. "Ah! I told Asdua what my bride was like—a face tinted like a soft white cloud with rosy colour; a voice like the whisper of the wind in the firs. 'Tis beautiful to know this is mine, is it not, Julius? Mine, yes! *mine, mine!*—But—ah! ye gods! she is dead—dead!"

Boescus suddenly reeled and fell, Julius just saving his fall into the fire. By night he was raving with delirium. Since no other remedy was at hand, Julius applied the handiest, ice, which was, unknown to him, the very best he could have used.

CHAPTER V.

"More dreadful far his ire
Than theirs, who, scorning danger's name,
In eager mood to battle came."

". . . . . My trust must be,
My gentle guide, in following thee,
The Lady of the Lake."

SCOTT.

THE fever at last spent itself, and at the end of a fortnight Boescus came to himself. His magnificent constitution alone pulled him through his illnes, which, probably, was caused as much by the hardships and privation of the last few months as by the sudden awful shock which he had received. He went on steadily amending, with a sort of tenacity of purpose, which refused to succumb to bodily weakness. He was very down-hearted, however, partly from the depression of convalescence, to a man unused to illness, and partly from an undefined sense of loss, the cause of which was very hazy in his weakened brain.

One night, about three weeks after his return to civilization, Julius Vitalis came in after his round of inspection, and, finding Boescus, as usual, staring moodily into the fire, remarked cheerfully, "The snow is going at last."

"Then I can go to Londinium, or to Aqua-Solis," said Boescus. "Julius, didst thou say aught of the lady Caia to me?" he went on suddenly.

"I! When dost thou mean?" asked Julius, evasively.

"Didst thou say she—was at rest, or was it part of my bad dream?" asked Boescus, slowly.

"I did say it."

Boescus heaved a deep sigh, and said, as if to himself, "*Ave Caia! sit tibi terra levis*," and then he checked himself, for it was part of an invocation to the dead, commonly used, but certainly not Christian. "*Who* told you?" he went on, using the formal second person plural.

Julius looked rather hurt, but he saw Boescus was dreaming, so he answered at once, "Aulus Valerius was asked by Gwynneth to tell me the news. Gwynneth is here now."

"Here! but why? She is a woman," cried Boescus, rousing himself.

"She came to find thee, Boescus. She was at Londinium, and when I sent to say thou wert safe she returned with my messenger. She is a Briton: *she* is safe," finished Julius, rather contemptuously.

"I will see her," said Boescus, briefly, rising rather unsteadily to his feet.

"Not to-night," said his brother, looking ruefully at his supper.

"To-night, at once!" said Boescus, with so much determination that Julius gave way, and, speaking to the sentry, bade him call someone to fetch the

British woman, and then he returned to the fire and his supper, whilst Boescus sat down again on his pile of skins and cushions. When Gwynneth came with the usual respectful gesture, Julius looked up, first at his brother, who lay back on his couch, once more in his dress as a Roman centurion, but covered with a thick cloak of scarlet cloth over his shoulders. The bright colour contrasted with the dead whiteness of his face: now quivering a little: now set in stern repression. The lips, firm and obstinate, were clearly shown as Boescus was entirely clean-shaven, and the clear, steady blue eyes looked up under the masses of fair curling hair on his forehead—a noble-looking man, in the best of his young manhood, but at present with the shadow of sorrow over him. Gwynneth, with eyes as blue, but faded and surrounded with wrinkles: her grey hair and well-marked features showing oddly against her travel-stained worn dress and appearance.

"Thou wishest to see me?" asked Boescus.

"I do, Boescus Vitalis; I have a message for thee, if alive."

"From——?" Boescus paused, and his eyes asked on.

"From the lady Caia, who is with GOD. She pined and wasted, for she loved thee, Boescus. The lady Lucia asked me to come and tend my nursling: she died here," pointing to her breast: "she asked of the Faith. Just at the last she was baptised, and she told me to say to thee that she always loved thee. 'Tell him I am one of his Faith now: I go to

the Good Shepherd: he will come. Tell him so.' At the last she bade me take this ring for thee, and whispered, for she was going then, 'We can think of each other and will see each other again, tell him.' Then she left us, Boescus," finished Gwynneth, simply. Little did she know that the young tribune by the fire was learning a strange lesson, one he never was to forget. She held out the ring to Boescus, who took it and kissed it, then put it on to his finger.

"I thank thee," he said. "This is great comfort in my sore need. I—will see thee—again to-morrow."

His voice was breaking a little, and he signed her to go. When, however, they were alone Boescus remained silent, a half-smile dawning through the sadness in his face.

Julius came and lay down close to the fire burning on two huge stones. "Boescus, what is the Faith of thine? Why, thou art no Stoic, yet thou smilest when I expected thee to weep?"

Boescus looked round. I am no Stoic, but I know my—*she* will be always mine now. We shall be together some day," he answered, quietly.

"That is strange. Why, this life is hard, why want another life?" growled Julius.

"That is different. I know little, but I know that."

"I wish I knew that," sighed Julius. "It was hard when my mother left us: dost remember it, Boescus? We thought we should not see her again."

Boescus remembered well the sad day when as boys of twelve they had shed tears together, but secretly, for it was not manly to do so, at the loss of the stately woman who had been true mother to them both.

"I wish I could—could I?" asked Julius, suddenly turning on his elbow.

"Couldst thou do what?" asked Boescus, whose thoughts were far away.

"See her again. Canst thou teach me?" said Julius, half ashamed of his own request.

"I know little of myself. What I know I will teach thee. But hark!" as a clear trumpet call rang out. "It is an attack!" and Boescus sprang to his feet, his weakness forgotten.

Julius had seized his armour, which he had laid aside, and he did not notice that Boescus was arming too. When he saw, he said, "Do not go, Boescus!"

"Not go! What! lie here when my blood tingles for battle."

So Julius gave way, and both hurried out into the bleak, cold damp night. The attack was a judicious one: lightly armed, lightly shod, the Britons had come up through the melting snow on a pitch-dark night. The camp was surrounded on all sides, but the well-trained soldiers fell in to their posts in a second. Fight as they might the Roman soldiery were driven back inch by inch by sheer numbers, as man after man went down, never, most of them, to rise again. At last the British leaders reached the

Eagles of Rome, where stood Boescus, towering above all, as he fought madly for the defence of the Eagles. Julius lay wounded near him, but Boescus and two or three others held their ground well. Face to face with them came the British chief, and it was Cornach, Asdua's lover. "Ah!" he cried, in broken Latin. "It is thou, thou dastard coward."

"No coward am I, Cornach," answered Boescus, in the dialect of the Belgæ, "but a sworn soldier of the Emperor."

"A dastard Briton," answered Cornach, doggedly. And then the fight went on. At close quarters the Roman short-stabbing sword did fearful execution, and the Britons faltered. A rush of the soldiers finally cleared the place of all but the dead and wounded. Boescus had the satisfaction of having repulsed the attack, the enemy evidently not daring to come to such close quarters again: they had lost many. Cornach had retreated, unhurt; indeed Boescus had carefully spared him in the *mêlée*, with a sort of generous instinct of gratitude to Asdua. They had lost many in the attack: the only other centurion was dead, and Julius was badly, but not dangerously, wounded, so on Boescus fell the disposing of the dead, and succouring the wounded, on whom Gwynneth was attending. Boescus felt the tide of his health and youth rising again as he went about on his multifarious duties, and he almost forgot the blank sorrow at his heart. At all events he had no time to think, for they were in a great

dilemma. Relief was not to come till March, and this was late January. They were sorely crippled by the loss of so many men, and the open weather made the chances of another attack only too likely. Julius was anxious to send to Londinium for help, but Boescus argued, rightly, they could spare no one to send. One day, after a fruitless argument on the subject, Gwynneth, who was attending to Julius' injuries, struck in to the conversation, "Send me, most noble tribune," she said.

"Thee! Thou art a woman," cried Julius, half raising himself.

"The most noble forgets I am a Briton," answered Gwynneth.

"By Jupiter! so thou art. But how can I tell thou wilt not take my message the other way to the Belgæ?" said Julius, looking up at her with a laugh.

"On the faith of a Christian thy message shall be at Londinium ere this moon be full," said Gwynneth, solemnly.

"I did thee wrong. But our wounded?" said Julius.

"Their wounds and thine are nearly healed, Julius Vitalis. But if help comes not soon thou and thy soldiers must die," said the old woman, meaningly.

"Ah, what dost thou know?" cried Boescus, looking up from a reverie.

"Yesterday I was gathering sticks. I heard voices. I was safe in a thicket of holly. Two

Britons were speaking of this place, and how they meant to exterminate you all, for help was coming to them."

"That *is* necessary to know. Thou must go, Gwynneth. May thy GOD keep thee," said Julius, gravely, waving his hand for her to depart.

"Julius, my brother!" said Boescus, when they were alone. "Let me go to these Belgæ. They will then not injure thee."

Julius sat upright on his couch. Boescus was standing, staring into the fire which lit up his face thoroughly.

"*Art* thou mad, Boescus?" cried Julius, after a long pause.

"Life is nothing to me now," said Boescus, looking up a moment with a world of sadness in his eyes. "Death is but the entrance of a life with—with—her;" he could not say the name.

"I cannot do it, Boescus," cried Julius. "To send thee to torture and death. Ye gods! what would life be then?" and Julius covered his face,

"We will not say so again," said Boescus, soothingly, "we must trust to Gwynneth."

Little did the two young officers know how near they were to being deserted. Didices, the propraetor, was very loth to spare any of his men. The bitter cold had decimated the southern Legion mainly forming the garrison, and the rest were young and untried. But on the strong representations of a few, he sent off a hundred men with their centurion. They arrived safely, to find the young tribune able

to get slowly about: he had been very shaken by an attack of fever after his wounds. The Britons had never attacked openly, but by cutting off foragers they had caused much annoyance. As soon as practicable the camp was abandoned, and the party set off to Regnum, there to be consolidated into a force to sweep over Southern Britain.

CHAPTER VI.

"And I hold in veneration,
Holy Church as His creation,
And her teachings as His own.
. . . . . .
And with a strong will I sever
All the ties that bind me here."

J. H. NEWMAN.

THE rebellion was crushed early in the summer, and the Legions settled down to their ordinary duties. Boescus was now a tribune, and thoroughly liked and thought highly of by those in authority. Many deeds of courage had attested his bravery, and although he had seemed to be in the thick of danger, yet he had passed totally unscathed through it all.

At Regnum there were several Christians, and they had weekly meetings. An itinerant Priest baptised him, one who had come over from Gaul, for as yet Britain had no Priests, the Celtic mission had not come. Boescus entered into the Faith fully, feeling himself brought nearer to the love of his life, Caia. Julius Vitalis was not a Christian, although he took a great interest in what he heard, and the meetings were held at the villa he and Boescus

shared. One fine day Boescus was in the guard-room of the western gate when a party rode up. The head of it was a middle-sized, slight, haughty-looking Roman gentleman, the rest a dozen armed slaves in attendance on the ædile. The usual formalities were gone through, and then Boescus heard the new-comer ask the way to the villa of Julius Vitalis, tribune of the Twentieth Legion. Boescus instantly recognised Lucanus, the father of Caia, and he came forward. Lucanus did not recognise him: his golden-crested helmet, and the graver, sterner expression marking him for a man of rank, and of some age. And Boescus had altered; his captivity had worn lines in his face; his sorrow had worn far more; his lips had a concentrated repression; his eyes, although keen and vigilant as ever, had lost the quiet humour that had softened their blue depths.

"Hail, Lucanus!" said Boescus, raising his hand in salute.

"Hail to thee, tribune!" said Lucanus, without looking up.

"Dost thou want my brother?" asked the slow voice, in perfect Latin.

"Thy brother! Who art thou?" cried Lucanus, gazing at the other rather nervously.

"Boescus Vitalis," answered the Briton, looking straight at his interlocutor.

Lucanus nearly fell from his horse in blank amazement. "But Boescus Vitalis was taken prisoner,—and did not return, we heard," he stammered.

"Boescus Vitalis *was* taken prisoner, but *did* return," said that individual, a faint smile curving his lips. "Wilt thou not come to our villa? My brother and I will gladly give thee hospitality," he added, with ready courtesy. "Marius," he went on, turning to a soldier, "see to the horses."

And so Lucanus was conducted to the villa close by. A slave prepared a bath for him, and presented him with wine. Boescus received him again in the peristyle, himself in his festal dress, to greet their guest. Boescus half sat, half lay on a seat by a little fountain which splashed musically into a marble basin, but he rose as Lucanus joined him.

"It is a surprise to see thee, Boescus, we deemed thee lost," said Lucanus, cheerfully. Boescus looked at him; his daughter's death had certainly added no line to his careless, handsome face, or a note of sadness to his voice.

"I was taken by the Belgæ, but escaped after three months," answered Boescus, curtly.

"Well! it was not so strange to thee as to us," said Lucanus, ignoring the fact that his host's training was as Latin as his own.

Boescus let the insult pass, and asked, "Is the lady Lucia in good health?"

"She is. There was much to try her in the winter, but——" Lucanus recollected Boescus' love for Caia, and even he disliked to tell what he believed Boescus did not know. Boescus stood silently, his face calm, but his fingers nervously

crushing the folds of his tunic. At last Lucanus blurted out, "My daughter Caia is with the gods."

"I know she is with GOD," said Boescus, quietly.

"How—how knewest thou that?" gasped Lucanus.

"My freedwoman, Gwynneth, once thy slave, told me."

"Ah! she nursed Caia, and taught her these absurd Christian theories. We gave way, as it made her easier, at the last. Otherwise we should not have permitted it," said Lucanus, an odd mixture of bravado and feeling in his voice.

"*I* am a Christian," said Boescus.

Lucanus laughed. "Ah, my good friend," he said, "it is well for thee. But for a clear-headed, Roman gentleman, a mere man-god who laboured and died a slave—— Bah!"

Boescus had learnt to keep his temper, both as Christian and soldier, so he merely did not answer this cruel taunt.

"Enough of this," went on Lucanus. "Thou hast not asked my errand, Boescus."

"I ask no questions of our guest," answered the Briton, with cool courtesy.

Lucanus laughed uneasily. "Thou art scrupulous," he said. "See here!" He held out a parchment, in which the commander at Aqua-Solis ordered Julius Vitalis, tribune of the Twentieth Legion, to accompany the ædile to Rome with dispatches. One other tribune, and a small escort was to go with them. Boescus had scarcely read this when Julius came in, excusing himself politely for his

absence. Lucanus put just twice the effusiveness into his welcome to the man he had coveted for a son-in-law, and expressed himself well entertained, and surprised to see Boescus.

"It is good to have him again. What hast thou there, Boescus?" said Julius, going up to his brother. Boescus put it into his hand, and he read with exclamations of pleasure. "To go to Rome," he cried. "I have always wished for it. And who is the other tribune to be?"

"That is thy business. I have naught to do with the escort," said Lucanus.

Julius looked up at Boescus, with a smile. "Thou wilt come?" he asked.

"Gladly," answered the other, briefly and decidedly.

Lucanus frowned, but he had no power to object. During supper they discussed their plans. Lucanus was to take ship at Anderida, and to cross to Gaul, from there to proceed in easy stages to Rome.

The tribunes each made their preparations; both saw to their arms and equipments; negotiated the disposal of the villa; and saw to the escort. Julius had several visits to pay to friends, and Boescus had the last words with the Christians. The night before they started a service was held, *the* service they alone held worthy of the name, in the inner court of their villa. Julius had contrived to get Lucanus to a supper party, and himself was absent at the beginning, but Boescus, in the full glory of his Roman tribunal dress, received the motley company: slaves, soldiers, and women of every

nation and tongue, for Britain was attracting many to her fertile shores. The missionary Elder, or Priest, was a wiry Greek, who had been converted not many years previously by a Deacon left by S. Paul at Athens. The service was simple enough: a portion of one of the Apostle's letters was read; the Prayer, the LORD'S Prayer, said; a Psalm, the 91st, sung antiphonally, for the Christians borrowed Jewish customs; and then the Feast was held. After which the eager, keen-faced Greek spoke in Latin, a short exhortation to follow on the way they had learnt, not to be afraid at the evil days which might come. At that moment Julius' figure appeared, and Boescus drew him aside. "Is anything wrong?" he asked.

"Nay! I have come to listen." And so he did: leaning against the pillar, his arms folded, listening with a wistful expression. When all had dispersed he strode up to the Elder. "What is thy name?" he asked.

"Alexander, of Athens," was the prompt answer.

"Can I be a Christian?" was the next abrupt question.

"Dost thou believe in the Christus?" asked Alexander.

"How can I tell? See, I must go to-morrow; can I go a Christian?"

Alexander shook his head. "Thou art not baptised," he said.

"Thou sayest thy GOD wills all to come to Him: thou makest it hard," said Julius, angrily.

Alexander looked up into the flushed face. "Julius Vitalis," he said, "thou art going to see the Emperor: wilt thou go unprepared, soiled with dust?"

"Nay, certainly not," answered Julius, wondering what this all meant.

"And wilt thou not approach him with all respect?" Julius nodded, and Alexander went on, "If Nero has a right to ask this of thee, how much more has the great GOD?"

"I cannot wait. My duty calls me," said Julius, sadly.

"When thy duty calls thee, O tribune, be sure that thou wilt be right to go. Thou canst be baptised in Rome. See! here is the transcript of a portion of the Apostle's letter. Read it, and may the great GOD grant thee light."

Julius took the roll, but he begged Alexander to stay on and talk, which he gladly did. Boescus welcomed the teaching, too, for his own instruction. It was dawn before Julius said, wistfully, "Then I cannot be baptised now?"

Alexander hesitated; in those very early days the Church had no hard rules of preparation. After a long pause he said, "Thou art not far from the kingdom, O Julius Vitalis. Dost thou desire Baptism with all thy heart?"

"With *all* my heart," he replied, earnestly. He was standing in the grey light of the summer dawn, bareheaded, a wistful look in his usually laughing eyes. Boescus sat just behind, his expression equally intent.

"And, if thou art commanded to do sacrifice, what wilt thou do?" asked Alexander.

"I will refuse," answered Julius, drawing himself up.

"Thy sacramentum binds thee to obey the Imperial decree," said the Priest again.

Julius laid one hand on his short sword, involuntarily. "If I am a Christian am I still bound by my oath?" he asked.

"Certainly. The Master saith thou wast to give to Cæsar what was Cæsar's, but to Him what was His. Thy worship is GOD'S alone: how wouldst thou act?"

"I should refuse to sacrifice," repeated Julius, steadily.

"Thou wouldst be degraded; perhaps cast to the beasts."

A sudden smile came over Julius' face, and he turned to his questioner. "I must ask thee a question now. What wouldst thou do?"

"Refuse to deny my LORD."

"And thou, Boescus?" asked Julius, turning to his brother.

"I am a Christian first, a soldier afterwards."

"Then," said Julius, "why should not I be as brave as thou? I could endure it all, GOD helping me," he added, using the Holy Name for the first time.

"Then," and Alexander took his hand, "thou believest that GOD made thee, and that the Christus, Who is SON of GOD, died to save thee, and rose again from the dead?"

"I do believe."

"Dost thou purpose to put away all sinful practices, and to abstain from heathen feasts and abominations?"

"I do."

"Then unarm thyself."

With Boescus' help Julius took off sword and dagger and cuirass, and stood in his white tunic.

"Step into the water. Thy names?" said Alexander.

"Julius Martius Vitalis," answered he, as he obeyed his order.

Alexander repeated the LORD'S Prayer, and then baptised him in the Thrice-Holy Name as "Julius Martius." And as the young man came up out of the water the rising sun fell on the glittering drops on his dark hair. And so another was added to the Church of GOD.

CHAPTER VII.

"Nay, said he, but men,
With strength and will to right the wrong'd."

"Who never sold the truth to serve the hour,
Nor paltered with Eternal God for power."

TENNYSON.

THE two tribunes embarked with Lucanus and their escort at Anderida the next day.

Lucanus was exceedingly surprised at Julius' gravity. He paid little or no attention to Boescus, but he rallied the usually-careless young man as their ship lumbered along with her triple banks of rowers; and the white cliffs of Albion faded into the distance.

"Dost regret going with me?" he asked of Julius, who was leaning against the mast, his eyes fixed far away; evidently he was lost in thought.

He started violently. "Nay, certainly," he answered.

"I notice thou art sad, grave."

"I have much to think of," said Julius, briefly.

"Thy mission is but to protect. Thou need'st not fear great responsibility," said Lucanus, patronisingly.

Julius laughed. "I fear nothing," he answered, with, however, a touch of haughtiness in his voice.

"Who sayest thou fearest?" asked Boescus, who appeared just then.

The ædile turned, half-contemptuously, on him, "Thy nation is famed for its brute courage, Boescus."

"And thine for its sharp tongues," retorted Boescus, calmly.

Julius laughed, and Lucanus, knowing he had gone farther than he ought, said, suavely, "Nay! I meant but a compliment. I was rallying thy brother on his unwonted gravity."

Both young men exchanged glances, and Boescus said, "There are other things than song and jest when we are on service. But there are the cliffs of Gaul," he added, pointing to the south-east where the line showed on the horizon.

They landed at dawn the following day, and, hiring horses, rode through the wild country. On the southern coast they took ship again for Rome. Wonderful were all the sights to the young officers, who had never been anywhere but in Britain all their lives. Lucanus was a Roman by birth, a native of Rome, and he delighted in acting cicerone. The great road to Rome, crowded with passengers and merchandise, amazed anyone coming from so primitive a colony as Britain. Now it was a company bearing wood or marble for one of Nero's building crazes, now a chariot, or, with jingle and tramp, a cohort of soldiers passed by. And at last

Rome herself on her seven hills, beautiful in the evening light, a mass of gorgeous buildings, and, alas! a mass of wickedness.

"There is the Eternal City," said Lucanus, drawing rein as they first came in sight of it.

Julius' blood was mixed Latin and Belgic; Boescus was pure British; yet both were educated to think that Rome was the one city on earth, and Julius gasped out, "'Tis a city to see, and die for!"

"Nay, to fight for!" said the practical Boescus, whose blue eyes were, however, gazing in awe at the sight.

"*Dulce est pro patria mori*," murmured Julius to his brother, and, by some trick of his brain, before the Briton's eyes rose the fair, misty land with its green trees, and soft sweeps of grass: that was *his* country. Despite his education he was no bad representative of Britons who, after nineteen hundred years, are as willing to die for Britain now. The party separated on reaching the city: Lucanus going to a friend's house, the two others to a house to the owner of which they had introductions. It was too late for the ordinary supper, but they were provided with an ample meal, and conversation flowed freely.

"Didst hear the talk to-night, Boescus?" asked Julius, as they were alone in the guest-chamber. The sleeping rooms were all round the inner court, and the guest-chamber was the largest of these small places, for the women only had more than

cubicular rooms. Therefore the brothers could speak in a very low tone to each other, and Boescus now nodded in answer to Julius' question. "Didst hear that the Emperor accuses the Christians of sedition, and will publish an edict?"

"I did not hear that," said Boescus, composedly.

"What shall *we* do?" asked Julius, in a whisper.

"Nothing till we must," said Boescus, laconically.

Next morning their host, a kindly old soldier, greeted them with, "There are to be fine doings to-day. Games in honour of the God-Emperor Augustus, and all must sacrifice. You will come, tribunes?"

"Wilt thou go?" asked Boescus.

"Nay, 'tis my guard at the palace, but all know of my visitors: two gallant soldiers from Britain ready to honour the gods. And here is the edict against those pestilent Christians," went on the old man, garrulously. Julius took the parchment which was held out to him, and read it. It was death to disobey, and Julius looked up over the roofs of that fair city, overshadowed by the brilliant Italian sky. He wondered whether soon he should be laid on the arena a mutilated form, despite his services under the Eagles, despite his high standing. Boescus had read the edict too, but neither spoke. Their host, rather surprised, spoke himself. "Of what nation art thou, Boescus Vitalis?" he asked, "thou art not like thy brother."

"I am a Briton. We are but brothers by adoption," answered Boescus, quietly.

"Then thou art a tribune. The Britons are wild and savage."

Boescus coloured. "Yes," he answered, "but I was adopted by Julius Caius Vitalis as an infant, and have never lived amongst my people."

"Ah! well, do not fail to be at the sacrifice. I must leave you," and the old man bustled off.

"It is coming," said Julius, grasping his brother's arm.

"What if it is," said Boescus, drawing himself up to his full height.

"Would it be wrong to fly?" asked Julius, doubtfully.

"Where couldst thou go? Thy dress alone betrays thee, and my face is too uncommon not to be marked."

"And our men? No, Boescus, we must keep our sacramentum, both to the Emperor as soldiers, and to the Faith as Christians," said Julius, with a sigh. Life was very sweet at six-and-twenty, and a possible martyrdom was not pleasant to contemplate. But neither dreamt of anything but a refusal to sacrifice. It was a relief when Lucanus arrived to get the two to accompany him to his audience with Nero, for it would preclude their being present at the sacrifice. They were ushered into the Emperor's presence with the precautions due to his intense fear of treachery. Lucanus advanced first, bending with fulsome deference before the handsome-featured, but sensual-looking, man, cruel and coarse, who held the reins of Government of that mighty Empire. His restless

eyes travelled from the ædile to the two behind him. The magnificent stature, blue eyes, and golden curls of the Briton took his fancy at once, and he evidently scarcely saw Lucanus. "Art thou a Briton, O tribune?" he asked, suddenly.

"I am, my lord," answered Boescus, with a salute.

"A fine specimen of a goodly land," said the Emperor, graciously. "And thou?" addressing Julius.

"A Belgic Gaul, Cæsar, and Roman on my mother's side."

"Ah! Well, ædile, what is thy news?" went on the Emperor, turning at last to Lucanus, never having heard the flowery speech addressed to him.

Lucanus concealed his wrath, saying, blandly, "I have despatches from Britain, Cæsar; there is disaffection."

"Disaffection! What knowest thou of that, O Briton?" said Nero, uneasily.

"I know naught except that I was their prisoner last winter, my lord," said Boescus, steadily.

"A prisoner! This is interesting. Tell me their secrets," said the Emperor, with a smile, which made him look all the more crafty.

"I know none, my lord."

"Oh! come, Lucanus, give my secretary the despatches. The audience is over. Stay! I wish to ask thee a question."

"Yes, Cæsar," said Lucanus, eagerly.

"Not thou! *Thou* art but a type of most of my subjects. But these tribunes—will you be of my guard here in Rome, and will you serve me

faithfully?" Lucanus' brow grew black, and the brothers glanced at each other.

"We are your servants, Cæsar!" answered Julius, at last, with a certain proud accent and bearing that Nero approved of.

"I will see thee, and thee again. Now begone," he said, graciously, to them both.

"So thou art in favour," said Lucanus, savagely, to Boescus, as they left the palace.

"So it seemed," answered Boescus, with northern calmness, which irritated the fiery Roman intensely. Boescus was surveying the magnificent city, of which he could now see so much.

"If Cæsar knew thou wert a Christian he would honour thee in a different fashion," went on the ædile, viciously.

"Most certainly," said Boescus, with, it must be owned, most aggravating calmness.

"By the gods! thou art cool," raged the other.

Boescus turned his eyes on him, looking down quietly, and speaking with an odd simplicity that sounded like sarcasm. "Why heat oneself! Besides, thou art hot enough for us both."

Julius burst out laughing, and Lucanus gasped with voiceless rage.

"Come, my brother, come after our men," cried Julius, as soon as he could speak. He succeeded in getting Boescus away, but neither guessed the enemy they now had in Lucanus. Days passed in sight-seeing and pleasure; rumour said that Cæsar favoured these two handsome tribunes, and this,

combined with their good looks and fine bearing, made them exceedingly popular. The edict against the Christians had not been again enforced, and at present the two were safe. They had attended meetings of the Church in Rome, and were received with open arms.

One day, a month after their arrival in Rome, a message came bidding them come to the Emperor at once. Hastily preparing themselves, they were soon standing in Nero's presence: he was seated, listening to some verses, and was attended by Tigellinus and Lucanus. Cæsar greeted them with a gesture, and signed to them to wait till the reading ended. The verses were his own composition, and his unlucky friend and favourite poet had been set to read and approve them. Bad verse, and absolute nonsense the tribunes thought them, as they stood in the gorgeous palace, themselves no despicable figures in their fine dress and soldierly bearing. Nero's furtive eyes were watching them in a side-long fashion, and when the poet ceased reading the Emperor asked, blandly, "Well, my soldiers, and what do you think of your Emperor's poor verses?"

Boescus opened his blue eyes with a puzzled stare; Julius, with a readier tongue, answered, "They are thine, O Cæsar, and therefore we have but one opinion."

Luckily Nero's vanity put a flattering conclusion to this speech. He smiled with gratification, and said, "Julius Vitalis, I hear thou and thy adopted brother are gallant soldiers, and have done our

Empire service under the Eagles in Britain. I have a service for you both, one I give as a reward to brave men."

"We are honoured, Cæsar," said Boescus, bluntly, but his eyes flashed at the thought of some gallant deeds or service for his country.

Nero looked at him, and went on, "Lucanus tells me of thy courage, Boescus. Now, hast thou, or Julius, ever heard of that pestilent sect called Christians?"

They both started, and Lucanus smiled slightly.

"We have, O Cæsar," said Julius, quietly.

"Then thou knowest the edict, which I, the Cæsar, have promulgated for the good of the Empire against them. This edict is mercifully, but easily, evaded by some, and this has been winked at. Now, tribunes, this is my reward to you. Take men this night, and break up their meeting; I will give you a guide. Slay those who resist, the rest capture for my pleasure to be performed on them. This for the good of the Empire, which you, tribunes, have so greatly at heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Stand firm like a rock, against which the waves batter, yet it stands unmoved, till they fall to rest at last."

MARCUS AURELIUS.

THERE was a dead silence when the Emperor finished speaking. Tigellinus was smiling cruelly; Lucanus had a half-nervous, half-triumphant expression. The younger men met the shock characteristically. Boescus folded his arms, and stood gazing at Nero out of his keen blue eyes. Julius flushed a dusky red, but stood equally steady. "Well, tribunes?" said the Emperor, impatiently.

"Cæsar! we are bound by our oath to serve thee," began Boescus. The courtiers' faces fell, and Nero, who had taken a great fancy for the Briton, nodded approvingly. "But," went on Boescus, quietly, "this, Cæsar, we cannot do. We cannot murder, in cold blood, defenceless men and women."

Nero grew absolutely green with rage, but he spoke evenly, far *too* much so. "Thou art an odd soldier, tribune; but what does thy brother say?"

"I have the same answer to give thee, O Cæsar?" said Julius, promptly.

"There is a mistake, tribunes; I say, slay thou those who *resist*. If none resist, there is no slaughter."

"We cannot obey thee in the matter," said Boescus and Julius together.

"Not obey! By the gods! consider. If this little service is rendered you have wealth, promotion, honour. Do not refuse." Nero spoke with some real anxiety: what manliness was left in him was taken by the splendid manhood of these two pure-lived, gallant men.

"Will Cæsar permit me to tell him something?" asked Boescus, stepping forward. The Emperor signed consent, and Boescus went on, in fluent Latin, but with none of the gesticulation of a Southerner, "Cæsar, last year we were summoned from Aqua-Solis just before the kalends of October[1] to defend Londinium. The night before we reached Londinium we were attacked: we had camped with a cohort from Anderida, of the Abulchi. The first slain was a sentinel near whom I stood, for I was visiting the posts. I defended this post till I fell wounded, and, in the darkness, the Britons carried me away. I was taken many miles, and thrust into a hut till dawn. Then I was brought before the chief, who questioned me. I gave my name and Legion, and he said all traitor Britons were to be sacrificed to the gods."

"Sacrifice! I knew not of their gods," said Nero. New tortures interested him keenly.

[1] The middle of September.

"The gods of Britain are supposed to be cruel. The sacrifice is one of slow burning of prisoners, or hapless folk," said Boescus, slowly.

Nero's eyes twinkled, "Ah! we must hear more of that," he said, with a pleased grin. "Go on, tribune."

"I told them I should not fear death, and they offered me life if I would betray the army."

"And thou didst so?" asked Lucanus, forgetting respect to the Emperor in his interest.

"I refused to do this, Cæsar," went on Boescus, not heeding or answering Lucanus. "I was a Briton, but I could not break my allegiance to the mighty Cæsar, except for one thing."

"Good! Thou *art* a soldier? What did they?" cried Nero, delighted.

"They said they never killed a Briton, but by torture. They would not kill me, but they would keep me close prisoner and blind my eyes. They did not put my eyes out, but they made me prisoner, till I escaped on the Ides of December."

"What was the one thing to make thee break thy Sacramentum?" asked Tigellinus, at a sign from Lucanus.

The crucial moment had come, and Boescus faced it. "My Faith," he said, quietly, "I cannot deny that."

"Thy faith in what?" asked Nero.

"In GOD; I am a Christian."

The answer acted like an explosive, Nero sprang up. "Tigellinus, Lucanus, go! order the guard.

Nay—but leave us with these misguided, but brave men. Have the guard in readiness."

As Lucanus passed Boescus he whispered, tauntingly, "Now we cry quits, O Briton."

Boescus heeded it not: both he and Julius were standing before the cruel, crafty Emperor, after the avowal that meant death.

There was a pause, then Nero spoke, persuasively, "Listen, O tribunes. Think what you are doing. I, the Emperor, do pledge my word you both have riches, honour, and thou, Boescus, thou art trusty, I fear my courtiers, stay and protect me, Christian as thou art; obey me in this little matter, and I care not what thou believest. None could touch my favourite."

"We cannot obey thee, Cæsar," answered Boescus, firmly.

"And thou, Julius Vitalis, thou art by birth Roman, dost thou refuse?"

"I refuse, Cæsar," answered Julius.

Nero really wished to save these two, but he was not one to brook opposition. Touching a silver bell, he ordered his guard to strip the officers of their arms, and all sign of their military and patrician rank, and to imprison, but *not* to hurt them. It was done, and they were close guarded to the prison, the mark of every vile taunt and insult that were very, very hard for two high-spirited young men to bear. But they were thrust, by the Emperor's grace, into a tiny room to themselves, and left unbound. The tiny window gave a faint light, although it was

getting dark. A stone slab was against the wall, and Julius dropped on to it, hiding his face to prevent his emotion being seen by Boescus, who, however, guessed enough to say, cheerfully, "Come, my brother, we are counted worthy to suffer. Be not so sad."

Julius looked up, dashing away the tears, of which he was ashamed. "So *this* is our reward. That villain, Lucanus!" he said, setting his teeth.

"He is but an instrument. Come, Julius, I grieve for thee; for myself, I and my Caia will be together, I only trust for a soldier's death."

"And *must* I forgive him?" cried Julius, springing to his feet. All the deadly hatred, passionate and intense, of a mixed Celtic and Italian blood surged up again. It was unchecked for all his life, so that Christianity had not yet stopped its course entirely. Julius had resisted temptation, and not denied his LORD, but he hated his enemy still.

Boescus replied with a significant gesture. No weapons were, of course, left them, but with a chip of stone, on the crumbling wall, he traced a rude Cross. The sight calmed Julius as no words could have done.

But yet when, chilled, hungry, and worn out, Boescus lay on the hard stones that night, to him, too, came the same mad longing just for life: freedom seemed priceless when the prison held him. He closed his eyes, and saw the broad sweep of the hills round Aqua-Solis, now in bright soft green, now glowing under fiery autumn tints. He saw himself dashing through brier and thicket after the

BOESCUS AND JULIUS IN PRISON.

"Julius lay asleep in the flood of light which shone on his dark hair and white embroidered tunic. On the wall was the rough cross."

Page 71.

wolf or boar, or again lingering in the spacious villa of Lucanus, with Caia's dark eyes fixed on his face. Or as he fought in that skirmish that winter night, barely recovered from his illness, yet with every vein flooded with the mad love of fighting, every limb feeling new life rushing back. Then he opened his eyes, and saw by the brilliant moonlight the tiny cell, his last resting place on earth. Julius lay asleep in the flood of light which shone on his dark hair, and whitened his white embroidered tunic, soiled and torn by the violence of their treatment. On the wall was the rough Cross; and as Boescus looked he lost his passionate longings, and gradually fell asleep.

Two days passed in deadly monotony. Twice a day food was brought them, but the confinement was terrible. They endeavoured to recall the discourses they had heard, including that letter from Patmos, so dear to the Church. Julius proved to have the best memory, and he got quite absorbed in his recollections. On the third day a new jailer came to them, and Boescus recognised him at once as his own servant. He made a sign of caution and reassurance, and, putting down the food, departed silently. When he had gone Boescus sprang to the pile of bread cakes on the stone slab. Julius was leaning wearily against the wall, his eyes fixed on the patch of intensely blue sky he could see. "What is it?" he asked, languidly.

"It is Gratius, my servant," cried Boescus, searching the bread. He found no clue to the

mystery, and they had to wait till evening, when Gratius appeared again, then he closed the door, and saluted. "How camest thou here, Gratius?" asked Boescus, eagerly.

"I came to help Status, the second jailer, most noble tribune; I have a message for thee. He is a Christian, and will help you both to escape. The Church bids you come out."

"Art thou a Christian, then?" asked Julius, who had sprung up, excitedly.

"I am, most noble."

"Where, and when can we go?" said Julius, voice and face dropping, dejectedly.

"To-night, at midnight. Status is here; he will give you disguises as soldiers. Many come here; strange faces are not noticed."

"To-night!" said Boescus rather unsteadily. It meant life and liberty, yet where should they go? As soldiers neither dared serve; whither in all the broad Roman Empire would they be safe? True, he, Boescus, could go to his native land, and there join the Britons. But no! he could not break his oath of service. He had stood irresolute, while the others watched him.

"*Where* can we go?" he asked, at length.

"I shall join Vespasian," said Julius, readily.

"Ah! yes. We will be ready, Gratius," said Boescus, with a half sigh.

"Why didst thou sigh?" asked Julius, when they were alone.

Boescus laughed a little, "One almost hoped our

warfare was ended, and the victory won; I suppose it is right to escape?"

"Right! verily, yes. Why, Boescus, I am willing to die for our Faith, but if we may live without denying our LORD, why, it is natural to wish to live. This world is beautiful." Julius Vitalis had no subtilties of belief, he accepted the Church's teaching simply with an absolute certainity. He was perfectly ready to die for it, as much as he was to die in defence of the Eagles. He would have gone to martyrdom with the same cool, steady courage, but he never pretended to wish for it, or not to avoid it if he could.

Boescus' grasp was deeper and wider. The unseen was to him very near, and his great sorrows had drawn him closer still to the links he held with his Caia. "The great cloud of witnesses" which the Church was almost daily gathering was to him a reality, there was no more thought of extravagance in his prayers for Caia now, than when she was in Aqua-Solis, and he in South Britain. He only was a little sorry that he was not to see her so soon, though he, too, felt glad he was not to die at once.

CHAPTER IX.

"No! true freedom is to share
All the chains our brothers wear,
And with heart and hand to be
Earnest to make others free."

LOWELL.

MIDNIGHT came, and under guise of ordinary soldiers the tribunes were passed out of the prison, Status accompanying them, as if they had been his visitors. Outside they found Gratius, and another man, who conducted them through odd byways to the river, where he passed them on to a rough country lad. So passed from hand to hand, as it were, they got away from Rome. Poor, small, frightened as she appeared, the Church had a mighty chain of agencies, and every Christian was bound to help the whole community. Fortunately Nero was very busy with a new play he had composed, which all Rome was to hear and see, and glorify the author. It was not for many days that he thought of the young tribunes; then their escape was tremblingly announced. Nero was in an excellent humour that day: Poppœa had pleased him very much by some honeyed words, and he was not unlike a sleek, well-fed tiger. He received the news with the demand as to who was head jailer.

On being told, he ordered his instant death by torture, his wife being burnt before his eyes, his children also burnt. Having settled these details to his satisfaction he remarked, with a feline yawn, "After all, my Lucanus, I am not sorry. That Briton was the proper figure of a man, and as bold as a lion. Six feet of manhood may do something yet."

"He is a Christian, Cæsar," said Lucanus, deprecatingly, with black rage at his heart.

"True! Well, let him be. Listen! my friend, listen! Have not I improved these lines?" and taking up a roll, the Emperor inflicted twenty minutes of bald verse on his victimised follower, who had to give unlimited praise.

In the meantime the two young soldiers were far away: travelling at all speed they reached the Gallic border. Reporting themselves truly as having come from Rome, and falsely as going on to Britain, they doubled back, thinking that if search were made they would now be safe. Boescus took the name of Alaric, passing for a Goth, and Julius his own second name of Martius. Under these they joined Vespasian's army, and were soon popular soldiers. When Nero died they at once made themselves known, and were then reinstated to their rank and real names. As soon as opportunity occurred they crossed to Britain, after nearly four years' absence.

Four years had nearly quieted the land: new villas were rising everywhere, roads and post houses in perfect order, and civilisation triumphant. Aqua-Solis was more magnificent than ever: shows went

on, sports, games; the Baths were all crowded. Lucanus was dead: he had incurred the Emperor's wrath, and he had been ordered to "open a vein," and be bled to death. Boescus went to visit the lady Lucia, who still lived in the villa so redolent with memories to the young man. The Latin races age early, and Boescus expected Lucia to look older; he was *not* prepared for the wizen old face he saw; she was little over forty, but she looked quite aged. Her younger children were healthy, happy young people, to whom Boescus warmed as Caia's brothers and sisters. Lucia's son was but eighteen, and she was not ungrateful for the Briton's advice and protection, although she still haughtily refused any idea that he and Caia loved each other, and, still more, she repudiated any notion of Christianity. It had not as yet taken hold in Britain, it was discouraged, and scattered slaves and soldiers, here and there, made up a not cohesive bulk. But still the Church was there, and it paved the way for the Columban Mission afterwards.

Julius Vitalis, like Boescus, was given a post of trust in Aqua-Solis, and after a while he married the young widow of an ædile, who was a Christian. Their house, with their two pretty children, became the centre of Christian life.

Boescus never married: he was soon high in authority in Aqua-Solis, and lived a busy and contented life, loving and learning more of the Faith as he grew older, and spreading it diligently in and about Aqua-Solis.

"THE FURY OF THE HEATHEN."

"More
The battle's loss, may profit those who lose
Than victory advantage those who win."

CALDERON.

"THE FURY OF THE HEATHEN."

CHAPTER I.

"Teach me to live, 'tis easier far to die."

"THE bells are ringing, Osric!" The speaker was a busy, brisk woman, who was kneading some meal in a rough wooden tub at her cottage door.

The cottage was a wattled hut: its uprights of stout poles, the intermediate walls being of osiers, deftly and strongly woven together. A low door and one unsheltered window were the sole openings for light, air, or the occupants of this structure. It was built on an islet surrounded by water and marsh, except at one point where a spit of firm ground approached near enough to be reached by a good leap, provided that the leaper had a pole to steady his jump. All the solid land had the bordering of sedge and marsh, where many wild birds shrieked and clanged.

It was a glorious summer morning: the fens looked their best under the blue sky flecked with

white clouds which were driven along by the light east wind. The same wind carried the sound of church bells across the water, and all who could, would attend the Chapter Mass at Crowland Abbey for the Feast of S. Barnabas.

"Wilt thou not come, mother?" asked the young man who answered the woman's call.

"Nay, Osric, Hilda is too sick to be left. But go thyself, and, if thou canst, ask Father Alfred for some cooling drink. Hilda thinks of naught else."

Osric nodded, and taking up a pole with a hook at one end, he went to the edge of the mere. There he drew to sight a boat woven in osiers, into which he got and poled himself over to the abbey, the wooden building of which, dominated by the rough stone church, rose on an island about a mile away.

Osric and Hilda were the two children of Osbert, one of the servants of the abbey. It was a mild kind of serfdom: they were kindly cared for in sickness and health, and indeed had the protection of the abbey against all tyranny.

Osric had been well-taught at the abbey school, he could read, and, with difficulty, write. He also knew something of the curious geography of those days, and he could sing. Musical notes as yet were not, but he could follow the odd little dashes and dots that were placed above the words in the service books. He had a store of tales and legends, sacred and weird, and he knew much of Cædmon's rythmic story of the Creation by heart.

So well, in fact, had he picked up his education

that the Abbot Theodore had wished him very much to become a novice. But Osric preferred the life of fishing, snaring, and conveying people and goods to and from the abbey. He was, indeed, the regular accredited messenger and guide between Crowland and the neighbouring country. His mother watched him as he poled his way along: a tall, sturdy figure, his fair hair uncovered, his dress a blue wool tunic, the brass collar of his serfdom round his neck, his feet wound round with strips of leather which extended to the knees.

He landed at the steps, and joined those flocking to the abbey, from huts around and from other islets. A low, dark place was the church in that year of A.D. 870, and no great show of vestments of gold embroidery, or vessels of great price. Evil times were at hand: the Danes were hovering about, none knew when they might come, and more than ever did the petition rise fervently, "From the fury of the heathen, good LORD, deliver us."

The Mass was sung to the same simple tones taught a hundred years before by John, the arch-chanter of Rome, to Bede, at Jarrow.

They were rough and untuneful, but the earnest fervour of the worshippers overcame such difficulties, which were, however, no difficulties to them as they knew no other music.

As the congregation left there were kindly greetings and friendly chatter, for S. Barnabas' Day was a general holiday, when none but absolutely needful daily work was done.

Osric was joined by his father, a tall, powerfully-built man of forty, his hair, originally as fair as his son's, tanned and ragged with exposure to weather, while a rough bristly beard gave a fierce look to his face. His dress was like Osric's, but he carried a heavy club stick with an ox goad at one end.

"Hast thou been to Mass?" asked Osric.

Osbert threw back his head with a sardonic laugh. "Not I," he growled. "The 'holy' fathers have no such love for me, or I for them, that I want to go in *there*."

"What is it now?" asked Osric, anxiously. He knew his father's insubordinate temper only too well, and he knew, too, that some of the monks far from understood the rough, outspoken, churlish thrall.

"That boy, Father Alwyn, has chidden me again for my neglect of work. By S. Cuthbert, he is but thy age, Osric, a mere boy to chide *me*, who knew every islet and channel before he was born."

"What was wrong with the cattle, then?"

"I had not taken them to the best pasture, so said the 'holy' father. It was Osbert's doing, of course."

He spoke with a sullen scorn, and Osric said, soothingly, "He meant nothing, father. We must do our work rightly."

"Aye! we *must* work," answered Osbert, in a different tone to his son, "and stand by meekly for words from any boy over there. 'Tis our duty."

"We were worse off, if we were thralls of some ealdorman," said Osric, cheerfully. "I am going to

Father Alfred for some cooling drink for Hilda, who wearies for it."

"Go thy way," muttered Osbert, "whining to thy 'fathers.' There is not so much manhood in thee, and them all, as in *one* of the Northmen." And he turned away to the outlying buildings where his work as cow-herd lay.

Osric meanwhile had entered the garden, which lay surrounded by the cloisters, over which rose the wooden buildings of the monastery. The garden was simply laid out: a vine or two, some herbs, a bush of roses, some apple trees, and a beehive were all the contents.

On this sunny day many of the monks were spending a few moments in the garden, and these greeted Osric with kindly notice.

One was at work at the herb border, and he rose from his bending posture as Osric approached him. He was a broad-shouldered, muscular young man of five-and-twenty, with the golden-brown, irrepressibly curling hair of a pure Saxon. Father Alfred's hair was a great trial to the lay brother who acted as barber: it grew so persistently long, and never was tidy and correctly tonsured. As he stood to his full height of over six feet he looked more like a warrior than a monk, although his blue eyes had a saddened look, but his lips were set in determined lines. And why was Alfred, son of Eadwin, Thane of Beccinghame in Norfolk, one of the old fighting family of the Becca, a monk, not a soldier? As he held out one hand to Osric, *one* cause was evident:

one hand, the right, was scarred and stiff, and a finger and a half were missing. Moreover, he was very lame.

Five years before Alfred had gone, with his father and two elder brothers, to join the levies against the Danes. After a year of fighting Alfred found himself the only one of Thane Eadwin's sons alive. His baby nephew was Thane of Beccinghame now, so Alfred married the daughter of a Kentish thane, and most unwisely settled down on the hills south of London. *Most* unwisely, for not two years after, the Danes came up to Sheppey, and ravaged the county. One day a lively party, out on a frolic, found Alfred's snug little homestead. To surround it with steel and fire did not take long, and soon the young thane, wounded and weary, escaped into a dense coppice close by with his young wife. They were unpursued; the cattle and pigs made a booty good enough for a surprise. But it was a wet spring, and the woods were bad shelter for a weak, wounded man and a delicate girl. She succumbed after the birth of her child, whose little life barely flickered enough to be called life.

Heartbroken, the young husband buried them in the woodland, and then, crushed and too weak to fight, his instincts turned to his far-distant Norfolk home. He set off, and reached Crowland. The Abbot was his cousin, and gave him a kindly welcome. Well for him he had reached that haven, for he sickened with one of the agueish fevers so common in those days.

As he recovered, the peace and busy quiet of monastic life attracted him, and he joined the community. He had been there two years, and had just been ordained Priest. He was made infirmarer, principally because the old monk who had filled the post had died. The monasteries were very lax in those days, and eligible men were frequently admitted to full vows and to orders within a short time, provided they were of the right age. Later on even that precaution was disregarded.

Vigour had returned to the young man, and withal a marvellous contentment with his life, a busy one, of healing (chiefly wounds and sores, and agues), and of prayer and fast.

He was the special friend and adviser of Osric. He greeted him now with, "How is thy sister, Osric?"

"She craves some cooling drink, father. She is in a fever still," answered Osric, with a bow.

"Ah! I will get it for her. She is not so well, then?"

"Nay, father, I trust it is not so," said Osric, with a keen note of apprehension in his voice.

"These fevers are loath to leave these marshy regions," said Father Alfred, with a smile.

It was a standing joke between these two, Osric defending his native dampness stoutly. "Others have fever, father," he remarked, now rising to the attack.

"So they do. Wert thou at Mass, Osric?"

"Yea, father."

"And Osbert, thy father, also?" asked the monk, turning his eyes on his companion. He knew all Osric's home difficulties.

Osric shook his head sadly. "No," he said. "Father Alwyn spoke to him about the cattle again. He was angered sore, and would not come."

"Ah! but have patience, Osric, time may mend matters. Father Alwyn is only a boy yet. But I will get thee the drink."

Osric watched the tall, strong-looking figure limp away, and he wondered, as he had often done, whether he should ever take up this life. No! not whilst the blue waters of the meres and streams lay before him, crowded with wild fowl; or the ice crackled under his feet, and the stars glittered as he strode home to the warmth of their hut on a bitter winter afternoon. Not whilst the white face and weak form of his sister lay day by day on the softest couch he could devise for her, refreshed only by his strong arms lifting her, and changing her position. He scoured the country for the eggs of wild fowl, for fish, and fruit; and from the monastery came all the invalid dainties of the age: very few, and very curious according to our ideas, to tempt the failing fanciful appetite.

Then, again, there was his patient, busy mother. and his surly, careless father, whose life seemed spent in his necessary work, or in fits of drinking when he was more sullen, more brutish, in a heavy, dull fashion, than at other times. Osric stood

thinking of these things, and scarcely heard Father Alfred return.

"Canst thou take me to thy sister? It is long since I visited her," he said.

"Truly, we shall be glad, father," said Osric, with alacrity. He loved to take his friend over; he enjoyed the wide sweep of mere and islet, the rushing and calling of the birds so much. At five-and-twenty the pulses all dance to nature's music. Osric secured the boat, and followed the Priest up to the hut.

Its arrangements were simple: one room, with two partitioned sleeping places, the survival of early Saxon days. One of these cubicles was Hilda's, the other her parents'. Osric slept on the mud floor of the hut, the centre of which was covered by a large flat stone on which was built the fire.

Summer though it was, Hilda now lay close by the smoking embers on a soft bed of skins and wool. She was a fine-looking girl of seventeen, but wasted to a shadow.

The monk raised his hand. "*Pax vobiscum*," he said.

Hilda's heavy eyes opened. "Hast brought the drink, Osric? I weary for it," she said, faintly.

"It is here, my daughter," and Father Alfred bent down to raise the flask to her lips. She drank long and feverishly, and sank back with a sigh of content. Father Alfred stood looking down at her with infinite compassion; little as he really knew of illness, it was not hard to see that she was dying.

"Osric, I am tired," she said, after a silence.

He lifted her in his strong arms, her head against his shoulder, and it seemed to rest her.

"Canst thou heal her, father?" asked the mother, coming from some household duties just then.

Father Alfred shook his head sadly. "There is but one thing to heal her—to be at rest," he answered.

Osric tightened his hold on his sister, and the mother broke out, "She *is* better now it is sunshine. It was the long cold and rain that made her ill."

"So it was. But the sun has come too late for her."

Hilda looked up, roused from her semi-unconsciousness by the raised voices. "I shall not get strong. I am glad; I am so weary," she whispered, too low for any but Osric to hear.

"Glad!" he burst out, passionately.

"Not to leave thee or the mother. But I cannot run out and call to thee, Osric, when thou art coming home. Or go to the abbey, or stand and feel the wind blowing over the meres, and sing for very life, I am weary of lying here; I cannot be weary in Paradise, father?"

"No, my child, there you will be well and happy," said Father Alfred.

"That is good. Osric, I will sleep," she said, with a happy little smile.

Osric let her lie down, and then walked out into the sunshine without a word Father Alfred followed

him, after a few words of direction and sympathy to Gertha. He found Osric standing on the verge of the islet leaning against a large alder, his strong young frame shaking with grief.

The other man, knowing from experience how little words can do, merely let his presence be felt by a touch.

Presently Osric raised his head. "*Must* it be, father?" he gasped.

"I fear so."

"GOD is merciful. He will not let me be left alone," cried Osric.

"She would never be well, Osric; think of her gain."

"I cannot—yet," and Osric dashed away.

Father Alfred sighed, and, turning to the skiff, poled himself back to the abbey, whose bells were ringing the angelus.

CHAPTER II.

"Coward! wilt thou murder slumber? a defenceless old man slay?
Whatso'er thou winn'st, thou canst not win a hero's fame that way."

LONGFELLOW.

THAT evening Hilda was dozing when her father came in. He had been out all day, and now had leapt over the space between their islet and the larger tract of firm ground adjoining. He was hungry and sullen, and he sat down on a rough stool, with a surly, "Hurry with supper, I am hungry."

Gertha had been alone all day, and she burst out rather unwisely, "Hilda is very sick to-night, I cannot hurry."

"What of that? She always pules like a crying babe. Give me food, woman."

His wife saw her mistake, and hastened to put before him a bowl of broth, not unsavoury from the bones of wild fowl in it, and a barley cake. Osbert had been drinking, but Gertha was not surprised; all fen men drank, and nearly all Saxons, and Osbert was not above his locality or nation.

When he had finished his supper he came up to his daughter, who still lay by the fire. Her weak-

ness was to him a thing to be jeered at, despised, not lovingly cared for.

"She will never be well," said the mother, coming up herself to her daughter and speaking softly.

Osbert turned on her with a dull kind of scorn. "Bah! woman. Then 'twere best she was gone. We have no room here for sick children."

"Osbert, have pity! She is our child," cried Gertha, in agony.

"A mere girl-child. Of what use is she to the thrall? To be the plaything of a noble, or the drudge of his lady. Or perchance to save her soul (he spoke with bitter contempt) by spending her life shut up in four walls, praying to One Who cannot hear the prayers of thralls."

"Osbert, silence! This is wicked," gasped Gertha. "If the fathers hear thee, we are lost."

"Never fear, there are better times coming for us than we now have. What thinkest thou of riches and freedom from this?" and he touched the metal badge of his serfdom.

"Riches! freedom! Nay, Osbert, it is impossible. We are born abbey thralls," said Gertha, stooping to arrange the coverings over Hilda.

Her husband laughed. "Thou knowest nothing," he said, cheerfully. "Well! put Hilda to rest. I will be in again soon." He went out into the summer twilight.

Osric was at the abbey: he spent the night there sometimes, and now he felt the burthen of his sorrow too great to bear his father's rough incredulity. The

lights in the church were lit for Compline, and one shaft touched Osric's fair head as he knelt by the pillar, praying earnestly for his sister, and for them all in the dangerous times, of which the clouds gathered more and more quickly.

Osbert, too, saw the lights, and faintly heard the chant, as, in his little coracle, he floated down a side stream for some distance. Then turning abruptly to the left, he landed, pulling up his boat, amongst the reeds. He listened a moment, then whistled a low, plover-like note.

Presently a hand touched him. "I am here," said a big, rough voice in broken Saxon. The speaker was a gigantic man, tall and broad, his dress half-linen, half-fur, with a golden corslet. His hair was long and tawny, and was covered with a helmet, on which were two wings. A heavy axe was in one hand, and a knife, or dagger, thrust into his girdle. "I am here," he repeated, with impatient authority.

"I could not get here before," muttered Osbert, sullenly.

"Speak quickly now. A free-born Dane wastes not time with a slave like thee."

"Pardon, noble Hunderik," said Osbert, cringingly, "I have the plan ready. Next week at dawn I will meet thee at Thorney Isle, and will bring thee to the abbey. We should reach it ere the Chapter Mass be ended, all will be there then."

"It is well. Thy reward is thy safety and gold. And for it thou wilt betray the hands that feed thee, eh?" asked Hunderik, sharply.

"Most noble Dane, I——," stammered Osbert, thoroughly taken by surprise.

"If thou wert a Dane thou hadst scant mercy. A Saxon thrall is a miserable hound, to betray his own people! Rather Thor or Woden, than to follow a GOD Whose men betray each other." The righteous scorn of the heathen made the unworthy Christian cower abashed. Then Hunderik burst into a loud laugh. "But it matters not," he cried, "thou art useful; fail us not in seven days or——" An expressive gesture finished the speech.

"I fail not—by the saints, I swear it!" stammered Osbert.

"Be sure thou dost not," and the Dane turned away. Osbert heard him crackling through the grass and reeds to the causeway, which, at no great distance, led direct to the sea coast.

Osbert sat still a long time in the brilliant summer twilight. Brutish as the man was, much as the somewhat irritating and occasionally ignorant authority of the monks galled his proud, passionate nature, yet he loved his native fens as he loved nothing else. When the Danes came what would they do? Would all be murdered? Would the church run blood? If so he would know it, he would be haunted all his life by it. There was still time to warn the fathers, to call the levies out. Surely, it would be best. But he had solemnly promised to help the Danes, and he must keep faith to them.

And while Gertha sat by her weary, moaning

daughter, and Osric slept heavily in a corner of an abbey outhouse, Osbert sat alone making up his mind.

He sat till the stars faded in the early summer dawn, then, chilled and stiff with the moisture rising from the marshy soil, he rose. He *had* made up his mind now. Through the night he had brooded over his fancied wrongs: the injudicious rebuke, the semi-sanctimonius admonition, perhaps from lips none too saintly. For, terrible as was the Danish invasion, there is no doubt that some of the monasteries wanted purifying.

A less strict observance of the spirit of monastic rule was coupled with a great minuteness in the letter amongst many monks. Bright and fair examples of holy lives there were in numbers, but some were but hypocrites. And Osbert knew this, and, with the sweeping condemnation of ignorance, included all in the accusation.

The Dane had promised him freedom and money, so to the Dane he stood, cost what it might.

The day was breaking fast when he pushed off his coracle, and the wild birds were rising from the reed beds. It was to be another fair summer day, and all nature was rejoicing. The pink flush of sunrising tinted the clouds, and away over the water came the softened sounds of Crowland bells, reminding all good Christians of the duty of praise and prayer before work. Even Osbert, by instinct and involuntary reverence, bared his head from his hood, and, crossing himself, muttered what stood for a *Pater-*

noster, though the Latin was mutilated beyond recognition. He did not go home, but pushed his coracle on to the abbey, where, *at present*, his work still lay. As he landed he met his son, who had come from the church, and was preparing to go home.

"How is Hilda?" he asked, eagerly, naturally thinking his father had just come from home.

Osbert looked up uneasily. "Thy mother is fearful," he growled.

"She is not more sick?" stammered Osric, growing pale under his ruddy tan.

"So thy mother thinks," said his father, with the same dull indifference.

Osric did not wait to ask more, but rapidly poled himself over the water. His hands trembled so much he could scarcely fasten the thong of the boat to an alder-stump, and his heart beat violently as he crossed the short piece of grass to the door. His mother was mixing meal: a homely task calculated to calm Osric's fears.

She looked up to greet him. "I am glad to see thee at last," she said, sharply. "And I, all alone this night with a sick girl."

"All alone!" repeated Osric. "Where was my father?"

"How do I know? He went out after supper last night, and took his boat. I have seen naught of him since then."

"I have just seen him over yonder at the abbey. How is she?" said Osric, sitting down. He began

to feel the strain of his last night's emotion and want of food.

"There now," said his mother, "thou art ill. No wonder, my boy, thou feelest sorrow and sickness of heart; thy sister is going from us." Osric covered his face to hide his tears. "There, take thy food, it will hearten thee," and Gertha laid her hand on her son's weather-beaten hair. And the bowl of smoky, tasteless, oaten porridge did put life again into the young man's frame, and he looked up with light in his eyes as he repeated his question about Hilda. "She is as she was last night. The holy father is right, though *I* never saw it before," said Gertha, sadly.

"Does my father know?"

"I told him, but his talk was all of riches and freedom to be gained soon. Osric, I fear such wild ways."

Osric frowned, but said, stolidly, "I know naught of his meaning; was he drunken?"

"Nay, not to matter," answered Gertha. "What *does* it mean, Osric?"

"I tell thee I know not," said he, impatiently, flinging himself away from close observation, although his mother had turned away to her household avocations. Could it be that his father's discontent was merging into treason, and that he was encouraging the Danes? Surely not; it was impossible that he could be so base, so wicked. And yet where could he get wealth, save by treachery or theft, and Osric did not think he would dare the latter.

"Art going to stand there all day?" asked Gertha, breaking in on Osric's thoughts rather sharply.

"No, mother, I am bound to go back. Father Abbot needs me to-day. But can I not see her?" nodding towards the rough partition.

"Nay, she sleeps for the first time since midnight. Let her be."

"She would have my greeting," said Osric, lingering wistfully.

"My son, she is moaning, and scarce knows anyone when she is awake. Go thy way, Osric, thou canst do nothing for her, but pray to the good GOD," said his mother, with the dignity that sorrow can give to the roughest.

Osric crossed himself reverently: the outward sign helping him to take comfort in the "thing signified." "I will go," he said, "and return as soon as I can."

"Best he should not," murmured his mother, as she poured out some thin milk for her daughter. "These fevers are not good to be near for the healthy." In which she showed the strong common-sense of a shrewd woman, for the laws of malarial fevers were certainly unknown then. But Gertha had lived all her life amongst the fens, and she knew these curious fevers well. The ague accompanying them was generally taken for a possession of the devil, and the sick were always exorcised.

CHAPTER III.

"Would I could die for them so they might live."

BYRON.

THE days slipped by, days of cloudless summer beauty. The monks of Crowland worked, prayed, fasted, and some of them, alas! broke their vows, as usual, and Hilda lay gasping her life away, too weak now to care to be lifted in Osric's strong arms. He was always at her side, when he could, though she rarely knew him. Osbert went on his way, sullenly preparing for the destruction of those who had fed him, and his father before him.

One night, a week after S. Barnabas, the monks had been singing their midnight office, and were returning to their sleep, when Osric hurried up to Father Alfred.

"Father, my sister! Wilt come at once?"

Sudden as was the apparition, the young monk quickly grasped the situation. "She is passing to her rest?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Come then, my son, I will see our Father Abbot. Here he comes."

Along the low cloister—overlooking the garden—came the Abbot Theodore, so soon to witness for his

Christianity by martyrdom. He was a tall, powerful man, in the prime of life, with darker hair and skin than any pure Saxon. And, indeed, the Abbot was partly of Celtic blood. He met the monk and Osric, with a slight start of surprise, but he asked with quiet dignity, "What is thy need, Osric?"

Father Alfred answered for him, with eager impetuosity, "Hilda, Osric's sister, is at the point of death. May I go and take her the *Viaticum*, father?" he added more humbly.

"Willingly, my son. Go thy way in peace. Where is little Edric, as thy acolyte?"

"I am here, holy father," said a bright child's voice, and a little boy came running up. This little orphan was the pet of the abbey; he was the Abbot's adopted son, having been given into his charge by the mother, who, dying soon after her husband was killed in a Danish raid, wished to make sure of her boy's welfare.

Osric poled the monk and boy across the mere, the faint glimmer of the lighted taper scarcely flickering in the still summer night air, just lighting the monk's bent cowled head and the boy's chubby innocent face, and throwing a shadow on Osric as, white and sternly silent, he went steadily onward.

At the usual landing-place Osric made fast his boat, helped Edric out, and stood reverently till Father Alfred landed. Then he followed them to the hut. At the sound of the tinkling *sistrum*, Gertha came to the door, kneeling at their approach.

"Peace be to thee," said the Priest when he entered, and went up to the gasping girl. The power to make confession was gone, but she made the Holy Sign in answer to the Priest's question if she repented of her sins, and he granted her Absolution *in extremis*. Then the Mass began and, short as it was, Hilda was nearly gone ere its close. Yet she lingered for some time, each breath getting more faint. The rising sun just flashed its light on the dying girl's face, and she opened her eyes, whether the light seemed to her but the foretaste of the heavenly light none of the watchers knew, but she gazed with a rapt expression for some minutes. Then she looked up at Osric, who was supporting her, with a smile, and then there was a quick shiver, a slight struggle, and she was gone. Osbert was absent, only Gertha knelt sobbing by her child. "*Requiescat in pace*," murmured Father Alfred, as he finished the beautiful Commendation then used. His thoughts went back to the time when he had laid his young wife, little older than Hilda, to rest under the trees of the southern forest. Osric laid his sister down, and stood, looking at the peaceful face. Gertha roused from her tears to do the last offices for her child, while Father Alfred drew Osric out on to the grass before the door. Edric had dropped asleep in the corner of the house after his services were over.

Osric had not spoken a word, he just stood in a kind of trance, his eyes fixed on the brilliant blue sky, as if following her soul in its flight. Father

Alfred let him alone for a while, then he spoke quietly, "It is her gain, Osric."

"Yea, father," answered Osric, in a tone that Father Alfred knew the sense of the words had not reached his ears. He tried another speech.

"Osric, I know loss, to lose one I loved. I had a wife,"

"*Thou*, father!" cried Osric, roused to interest at last.

"Yea. We lived at Beccinghame, in the south, and the Danes burnt my house, killed my servants, and we were forced to fly to the woods. There she died. GOD rest her!"

"And thou, my father?" asked Osric, as the monk's voice faltered.

"I was sorely wounded as thou knowest," said Father Alfred, holding out his maimed hand. "Our Abbot here, before our present Abbot Theodore, was of my family, the Becca. I came here for rest and comfort."

"Rest and comfort," said Osric, with a sigh. Just then the bells began for the Chapter Mass, at eight o'clock, and Gertha came out to tell them all was ready. Father Alfred and Osric went in to where Hilda lay quietly, as if asleep. Edric stood awe-struck, his hands clasped in prayer. Then Osric's composure gave way, and dropping on his knees, he sobbed out broken words, half his own, half out of the Psalms. Father Alfred knelt too, taking up the Psalms, as they fell in disjointed sentences, and there was no other sound, till little Edric, with almost a

shriek of terror, cried. "Father, the abbey is burning. See the smoke!"

Startled, the two men sprang to their feet. Great clouds of thick smoke and flames were rising, and worse, cries and sounds of tumult crossed the water, including the fierce Danish war-cry.

"The Danes! My GOD! Let me die with them," cried Father Alfred, rushing as quickly as his lameness allowed to the boat. But Osric reached it before him, and stood barring the way.

"No, father!" he cried. "It is too late. It must be over now. Fly! Save thyself and Edric."

"Save myself! Would I could fight those accursed Northmen. Osric, I *will* go," and Father Alfred's eyes once more flashed with their old warlike fire.

"No, father. Listen, there is silence. May GOD have pity on us all now," and Osric shuddered.

"Oh, my friends! my brothers! Why was I not there to die with you?" cried the young monk in an agony.

"Let us pray for them, father," suggested little Edric, sobbing. The suggestion was caught at and literally with "strong crying and tears" they recited the office for the dying and dead. Suddenly Osric said, "A boat is coming. Hasten, father, with Edric to the willow yonder. It is large enough to hide you both."

And as the boat neared the islet on one side, Father Alfred dragged the frightened boy through the reeds, to a large willow where they were quite hidden. Osric came out from the cottage as the boat

THE BURNING OF THE ABBEY.

"With 'strong crying and tears' they recited the office of the dying and the dead."

Page 102.

came up; it contained, besides his father, two Danes. Osbert hailed his son, with a surly command to come and help him, and Osric obeyed in silence. One of the Danes was evidently a man of rank, the other a mere stripling of equal rank, but who eyed Osric with some curiosity. When the party landed, Osbert said to the elder man, "This is my son, noble Hunderik." The Dane looked Osric up and down with a kind of appraising glance, yet Osric, against his will, did not dislike the Dane's appearance. He was far more angry with his father.

"Didst thou belong to the shavelings yonder?" Hunderik asked.

Osric drew himself up. "I am their born thrall," he answered, proudly.

"Thou hast women-folk?" asked Hunderik abruptly of Osbert.

Osric broke in, addressing his father, "Hilda ——," he paused. "She is at rest," he finished at last.

"At rest! dead! Oh! my sin, my sin!" cried Osbert with a terrible cry of remorse.

"What *does* the man mean?" asked the young Dane, contemptuously.

"I know not, Eric. But, man, show me thy house-place" and Hunderik seized Osbert by the shoulder.

"Not while *I* live," shouted Osric, as, unarmed as he was, he threw himself in front of the door.

"Eric, take him away, but harm him not. He is a brave lad," said Hunderik, quietly.

Eric advanced to obey, but received a stinging blow in the face, that made him stagger. Quick as lightning his axe was ready, but Hunderik stepped forward, with a laugh. Pushing his son aside, he caught Osric in an iron grip. "Lie there," he cried, "no harm is meant to thee or thine."

Something in the laugh, and the tone made Osric keep still, but he could see what was going on. The Danes went in, but soon came out of the hut, evidently more appalled than by any danger or foe.

Hunderik took from his girdle a bag, and gave it to Osbert, saying scornfully: "Here, slave! here is thy reward. I must have thy son, he is a likely lad."

"My son!" stammered Osbert.

"Spoke I not plainly? Get up, boy! Thou wilt be ready by dawn to-morrow?"

"I cannot," said Osric, sullenly, "my service is here."

Hunderik laughed grimly. "Dost thou not know that not one of the shavelings lives?"

Osric sprang to his feet.

"Yet," went on the Dane, "that old man made a gallant show standing in front of that Altar of his. He was as brave as a Northman, and never moved as we burst in. *He* was killed outright, it was the reward of his bravery."

Osric covered his face, praying as he did so, for him who had been so good a friend to all his dependents. "Why didst *thou* not die in his defence?" he suddenly cried, turning fiercely on his father.

Osbert shrank back, stammering out a lame excuse. "I—was bound."

Hunderik, however, supplied the truth by a blunt answer. "He brought us over yonder, he cared so little as to betray his masters for gold." The rough, Northern accent was replete with the contempt of a brave man for a coward.

Osric sprang forward, seizing his father, with all his young man's strength. "Thou!" he cried, shaking him like a dog would a rat. "*Thou* betray those who have worked for us, with us, those who have prayed for us, those who have fed us? And for this!" He suddenly got hold of the bag still in the traitor's hand, and, tearing it from the nervous fingers, flung it far out to the waters, where it sunk with a low splash. "There!" gasped Osric, "never shall we touch blood-money. Oh, GOD! thou art my father!" and Osric released the shrinking, limp man, who staggered backwards against Eric, the young Dane, whose knowledge of the vernacular only enabled him to guess at what was passing, but Osric's gestures were significant enough. He gave Osbert a push, and strode over to Osric, who stood trembling with rage.

"See!" said Eric, "I like thee, thou art a man. Grieve not for the shaven heads, come with me and be my servant. None shall hurt thee, and thou canst fish, and punt, and fight as thou wilt."

Eric had tried to put this into as good Saxon as he could, and Osric understood him, but paused ere he answered. The two lads, much of an age,

though Osric was a year the elder, stood side by side, both handsome, agile, and manly, the thrall in his rough tunic, the Dane in armour already dinted and worn, with red ominous stains on his white under tunic, fit representatives of two races soon to mingle in a common bond of nationality.

Osric was crushed, and sad at heart, and he answered at last, "I am a Christian."

"What of that?" laughed Eric. "The life we lead is a life for men, not shavelings. They call *me* weakling because I hate to kill men who will not fight. I saw the King Edmund die, but *I* did not help to kill him. Wilt come with me?"

The voice was sincere, and Osric answered simply, "I will come."

"Good," said Hunderik, whose one soft spot was his son, the only child alive out of many. So unmanly was it considered by the fierce Danes to have any softness, that Hunderik concealed the fact from his fellows.

"May I have one day more here?" said Osric, with a quiet kind of indifferent submission. "My sister lies dead, and is to be buried. Besides ——" He stopped, as Father Alfred occurred to him, suddenly."

"To-morrow at this time come to us, at the camp at Peterborough. Eric, give thy man some token or he will not get far," said Hunderik, grimly.

Eric detached a bracelet from his wrist—from its cameo, evidently the spoil of some raid—and gave it

to Osric. "All know this to belong to Eric Hunderikson," he said.

"Osbert, take us back now, we must join the others," said Hunderik, as Osric received his passport in silence.

"What wilt *thou* do, mother?" said Osric to Gertha, who had stood trembling in the door-way.

"Starve, Osric," was the answer. It was true enough, the serfs had no one to give them food, now the monastery was destroyed.

"Peace, fool!" growled Osbert, like all weak cowards, venting his anger by a blow at the most defenceless person present. The blow was, however, caught on the shield of Eric.

"Base slave!" he thundered. "By Thor, thou touchest not a woman."

"Mother, *must* I go?" cried Osric.

"Yes, my son. Go thy way. We will speak of it again."

"Here, slave Osbert, take us over," said Hunderik, waxing impatient. "Osric, we hold thee true to thy word."

"I am thy man, in all things save my Faith. Thou hast dealt honourably, Hunderik the Dane," said Osric, proudly.

"Be true to us, and I will be true to thee. As to thy Faith, forget it," said Eric, cheerfully, as he stepped into the boat.

CHAPTER IV.

"Blessed are those who die for GOD,
And earn the martyr's crown of light,
Yet he who lives for GOD may be
A greater conqueror in His sight."

PROCTOR.

OSRIC stood watching the boat as it vanished into the heavy pall of black smoke veiling the smouldering buildings of the once peaceful monastery, and then he flung himself on the ground with a bitter imprecation. How long he lay still he knew not, but a hand touched him, and a broken voice said, "Rise, Osric!" And then, as if his sorrow must find vent, Father Alfred went on in Latin with the words, "How long, O LORD, how long?" Osric sprang to his feet and faced his friend, who said, "I heard it all, Osric; thou didst well."

"Well! But, father, it is that treachery of my father's; *that* is what drives me away. Can I stay here to be hated by all men?" demanded Osric, passionately.

Father Alfred looked across the still, sunny waters to the heavy, sullen smoke cloud, and set his teeth. The words that rose to his lips savoured more of the soldier than the monk, and he choked them back

with an effort. After a pause he spoke, with a voice that told the effort it had been to keep back his rage. "Osric, much has to be done ere night; I *must* go there to—to see if aught remains for burial. It were well that Hilda was buried here, we dare not take her to our burial ground. But, Osric, I must not go over thus; hast thou another dress?"

Osric shook his head: he possessed but his coarse blue tunic, with a skin tippet and hood for winter, and the strips of leather serving the purpose of leggings, with a pair of otter skin shoes. "I remember," he said, suddenly. "Mother, thou hast the clothes of that man of the Lord of Bourne who died here after being in the ice last winter. They are not like thine own, father, and will hide thee well."

"They must serve," said Father Alfred, briefly, and Gertha, rummaging in the chest which held all the family goods, gave the clothes to the Priest, who retired to change his dress.

Edric had been sobbing, frightened, in a corner since his release from hiding, and he now ran up to Osric. "Those dreadful men!" he cried. "And where are the holy fathers?"

"In Paradise," answered Osric, absently.

Edric stared, wonderingly. "All of them?" he asked.

Osric smiled: the simplicity of the words were almost comical. "Father Alfred and I are going to see. Be good, Edric, stay with my mother; be her comforter while I am gone," said Osric, putting his hand on the boy's head.

"May I not go, too?"

"No, no, Edric!—and say thy prayers for the living and the dead. Art thou ready, father?" he added, as the monk appeared, certainly metamorphosed, in his dark tunic and hood, with a dagger in his belt. The hood was over his head, so only the crisp fair hair showed in front.

"Who is this, Osric?" cried Edric, alarmed.

"Ah! thou dost not know me, that is well. Mind, I am Alfred, servant of the Thane of Becca."

"Yes," whimpered Edric, for Father Alfred, in his tension of nerves and sorrow, had spoken with the old sharp tone of command, quite unlike his usual kindly voice.

"There, there, child! thou art hungry, come with me and eat," said Gertha, soothingly, taking the cold little hand in hers.

So Edric consented to go with her, whilst Osric and his friend pushed off, and soon came to the desolate scene. No one was about; indeed, there were none to venture, seeing that every homestead near by was destroyed, and those further inland could hardly yet have had news of the ruin. Up the steps went the two men, through the outbuildings, perfectly empty, for the cattle, sheep and pigs had been taken. A lay brother and a cow-herd lay amongst the straw, their heads cloven by the Danish axes, and both quite dead. The main buildings were still smoking, and in the garden, in the midst of a tangle of wild rose bushes, lay one monk, the very father whose boyish irritability had, unwittingly,

caused his own death, and the destruction of the monastery. He lay with folded hands: a short dagger yet sheathed in his heart, his fair face, with its circlet of brown hair, staring up into the summer sky. The two stood speechless, then Father Alfred stooped and crossed the forehead with the Holy Sign, whispering, "*Requiescat in pace.*" Then, as if dazed, he moved on to the church, and there paused. In the doorway stood a fully-armed Dane. For a moment both young men hesitated, then Osric discovered that the Dane was none other than Eric, son of Hunderik.

"Oh!" he cried, "dost thou come here to see thy friends? I am here to wait till they return. We are full of plunder, and we could not take it all at once. I am guarding the rest. Who is this other?"

"Alfred, servant of the Thane of Becca," answered Father Alfred, steadily, though his lips quivered as he looked through the doorway, and saw the awful carnage and sacrilege.

"Why did I not see this man when I was at thy island?" asked Eric, suspiciously, shifting his hand to a tighter grasp on his deadly weapon.

"He came to me afterwards," said Osric, truthfully enough.

"It is well," grunted the young Dane, still only half at ease. His kindly young heart had revolted against a slaughter so deadly as that which opened before the eyes of the others, as they passed him unopposed into the church.

The fire was still licking the roof, but the massive rough stone pillars defied the flames, which were dying out; the atmosphere was, however, suffocating with smoke, and the horrible sickly smell of carnage. The High Altar, being stone, stood intact, but bare, stripped of its coverings and plate. At its foot lay the Abbot in his white alb, truly the white role of martyrdom; his chasuble was gone. There, too, lay the best of the monks, as if they had gathered in defence of their Abbot, and had died with him.

The living standing in that ghastly place neither spoke nor moved from the sheer horror of it.

"Would to GOD I was with them," gasped Father Alfred, at last.

"Our men are coming back, they had best not see you both here," shouted Eric, his voice breaking the deathly silence grimly.

"I *will* die with them," cried the monk, springing to the door with a fire in his blue eyes.

Eric put him back with a buffet that nearly knocked him over, quiet and friendly though it was meant to be. "By Woden, man, thou art keen to die! But there has been enough slaughter for me," said Eric, with a glance backwards. "Go thy way, they will fire this place again after all is gone. So go, it is best so for thy friends."

Father Alfred still lingered, but he had begun to turn away, on an impatient gesture from Osric, when he caught sight of a small book at his feet. He picked it up: it was a psalter, Latin and Saxon on

parallel pages, perfectly illuminated, but with a dark-red stain seaming the pages. "I will keep this," he said.

"Well, well! go quickly," said Eric, hurriedly, pushing them out into the garden. It was time, as already shouts and songs showed the Danes were close by.

Pushing their coracle amongst the reeds, it was not long before the two heard the boisterous mirth as the buildings were again fired, and then the party departed.

Father Alfred was praying, half audibly, for his enemies, and for his friends whose funeral pile was blazing.

Osric was standing leaning against his pole, his face set and rather stony, as if the horrors had paralysed his powers of expression. Presently he asked, "Where wilt thou go now, father?"

"To Lincoln. The fathers will take me in there, for CHRIST'S sake." Father Alfred little knew that the whole of Lincolnshire had been ravaged alike.

"My mother has no home now," said Osric, quietly.

"She and Edric can come with me. I will care for her, till I bestow her in safety. And Osbert, thy father?"

Osric's face hardened. "I hold no kin with traitors," he answered, savagely.

"He was angry, he bore a grudge against us——" began Father Alfred, but Osric stopped him with scant reverence.

"It may be sin, father, but to me he is no kin now. He is worse than dead, indeed I would he were, then I—I might have some feeling of—of pity for him. By S. Cuthbert, what is that?"

Osric broke off his words suddenly as a rustle and crash was heard in the neighbouring reed beds. A groan followed, and Osric and the monk were soon crackling through the marshy ground. They soon discovered the body of a man, lying face downwards in a pool of water, an arrow sticking out under his shoulder-blades. Osric bent down and turned over the body, and, despite his late words, he received an awful shock when he found it was his father, quite dead. Apparently the Danes, in their playful ferocity, must have given Osbert his *quietus*, after having used him as much as they wanted.

"Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the LORD," said Father Alfred, solemnly, as he helped to lift the body.

Osbert must have heard the voices, and staggered on in the hope of relief, but had fallen before reaching them. Silently he was laid in the little boat, and taken home, and Osric had no need to tell his mother. She was waiting, and saw at once. Perhaps she, too, felt a relief in her husband's death, after his black treachery; anyhow, she was calm indeed as the peasants who were lurking in the reeds or forest came to hear the news, and to rejoice over Father Alfred's safety.

The times were hard, the manners rough, and none scrupled to say that Osbert's treachery had blackened

the family. But all were glad to find that the much-beloved Father Alfred was safe. It was in the summer darkness, which is hardly darkness at all, that Hilda and her father were buried: with passionate sorrow for her, but with bitter regret for the want of sorrow for him. Osric and his mother stood together as the bodies were laid side by side by the peasants in one shallow grave. Father Alfred, in his habit again, but with no vestments (they were in the Danish camp, or destroyed), with Edric as acolyte, said the few prayers that the Saxon burial office contained, the customary burial Mass having to be omitted from lack of the Elements.

Then Osric turned away towards the still dingy, dark hut, which had been his home all his life. He had worn out the more demonstrative side of his grief, and was quiet, calm, and very silent. His mother was worn out in watching, grief, and horror, and Osric persuaded her to take a rest; Father Alfred, too, was so fatigued that he lay down with Edric, and Osric was soon the only person awake. He sat looking out over the moonlit water, it was perfectly still; in the distance the cloud of smoke still lingered, while the oppressive smell of fire was wafted by the faint breeze. Only the note of a night bird, and the dismal croak of the frogs broke the silence.

Osric felt no inclination to sleep: he was, as we should say, too highly wrought up, and so there he sat in a sort of trance. At last his senses came back, and he began to feel.

It was a battle to be fought, and Osric fought it bravely. But he made up his mind to live as truly and faithfully to his GOD in the heathen camp as in his peaceful thraldom. And to ratify this, Osric repeated a *Paternoster.* Then he sat down again, but gradually his eyes closed, and the tired nature had its way, and Osric slept for several hours.

CHAPTER V.

"Seek not much rest, but much patience."
THOMAS Á KEMPIS.

"WHY man has not come, Eric?" said a big, boney, fiery-haired, young man, to the son of Hunderik, as they lounged on the warm ground of their camp.

"He will come," grunted Eric, burying his face in a cup of wine, a gold chalice, with a roughly-modelled crucifix on it, a sad reminder of its sacred uses. "What is this?" he added, as he put down the cup and noticed the figure.

"I do not know, but I have seen it before. I suppose it is one of their heroes."

"It's the shaveling, then. I say, Thun, I wonder if He was a defenceless Man, like those we killed yesterday?" said Eric, rolling over on his back.

"By Woden, man, what matters their not fighting? Did not the chief say they were to be wiped out of the land? A mere woman's faith; give me ours, with its freedom and liberty, and the glorious home for warriors who die fighting."

Thun had stood up, and his words had shaped themselves into a chant, so common amongst semi-savage nations.

Eric caught the fire of it, and, springing up, he cried, "I want no weakling faith, the free Northern life for me. And yet," and Eric's eyes wandered over the quiet green flat landscape, so unlike the wild, stern, rocky fiord, where was his home, "there *is* something in this land which makes one feel that fighting—is not all," he added, shamefacedly, for his doctrine was very new, and not palatable to Northern ears.

"Thou art sick, Eric?" said Thun, with a ludicrous air of puzzle. Thun was troubled with no scruples: to fight, to eat, to drink, and to die fighting was all he thought of. He had a sort of respect, coupled with a lurking contempt, for his slighter and more sensitive friend, to whom he was devoted.

"Ill! not I. But this is Osric. I will go, or the guards will not let him pass."

The sentries were questioning Osric in their mixed dialect, and Osric was trying to satisfy them. On Eric's appearance, one of them asked him if "this Saxon," with a tone of immeasurable scorn, "was coming to him?"

"Yes; he is to be my servant," answered the young chief, for so Eric was at home. "And mind, Oderik, he comes and goes unquestioned: he is Osric, and he serves me, and I alone have rights over him. Tell this to thy fellows."

Eric spoke with an authority he seldom showed, and the men gave a sullen assent. They dared not disobey the son of so powerful a man as Hunderik. Osric was passively following Eric, he was worn out

with the long strain on his powers. He was taken to the centre of the camp, where was a hut of loosely piled stones, thatched with reeds, before which floated the dreaded Raven-banner. Eric entered, bidding Osric to follow him. Hunderik was stretched on a pile of furs and draperies, the latter obviously recent possessions, and he seemed half asleep.

He sat up, however, as his son came in. "Ha! Eric, where hast thou been?" he asked, his eyes lighting with unaccustomed softness.

"I have been with Thun. I have now brought Osric, he has just come."

The huge Dane looked up at the lads, not so very unlike in appearance save that Eric's frame had the promise of greater bulk. Osric was the strongest of the two, although far slighter. From under his shaggy eyebrows Hunderik gazed.

"Come here," he said, and Osric obeyed. "Give me thy hand." Osric put his strong hard hand into the big hairy one. "Now," said Hunderik, "remember I have saved thee to serve my son. Obey none but him or me; I cross him in nothing, he is his mother's only child. The rest were weakly, so one night we put them into a ship, and set it on fire, and thrust it away." Osric shuddered with horror at the cool announcement. Hunderik went on, "Serve Eric well, and thou art safe; neglect, or betray us, and thou diest! One thing more, speak not of thy Faith, or I cannot save thee. Now, wilt thou serve my son as I have said? Promise, on—thy gods."

Hunderik made a perceptible pause before he conceded so much.

"I promise, so help me GOD, and all His holy saints," said Osric, solemnly, releasing his hand in order to make the Sign of the Cross.

Eric stared wonderingly, then came forward.

"There, Eric, take thy man," said Hunderik, not unimpressed—great barbarian as he was—with Osric's words and gesture.

"Canst clean harness?" asked Eric, as he and Osric stood under the banner, watched by many curious eyes.

"No; but I can learn," said Osric, indifferently.

"So thou canst. What *canst* thou do?" said Eric, cheerfully.

Osric hesitated. "I can herd sheep and pigs," he answered. "I can pole a boat, and tend a garden. I can read a little and sing."

"Read! there is no one here who needs reading: but singing, that is different. Now I must show thee thy work."

So Eric took his new companion through the camp, in order that everyone should know him. It sickened Osric to see the rich embroideries, and silk vestments, spoils from Peterborough, Ely, Crowland and many another church, lying on the ground. Here, too, were cups, flagons, censers, and priceless manuscripts heedlessly trodden under foot, or used in sacrilegious carousal, for the Danes were using their leisure to eat and drink.

Eric gave Osric a white tunic, and the light

chain shirt of a dead Dane, also a dagger and short spear, which he picked up out of a heap of loot.

So Osric was armed as he never had been before, and he followed his young master as his personal attendant. True, he was clumsy at first over the armour, and use of his weapons, but, after all, the fighting instinct is very keen at one-and-twenty, and Osric soon adapted himself to his circumstances. Eric protected him from all but rough words and an occasional blow, but Osric's life had never been of the kind to allow those to trouble him at all.

As to his Faith, no one bothered him about it, he was not of sufficient importance. His master left him behind on their raids, because he was a Saxon, and the men would not have trusted him. Food was in abundance, and Osric got used to seeing the herds of cattle and pigs brought into camp, often with other spoils of the blazing homesteads. By the autumn they had pretty well devoured the country, and began to talk of a move southward. Many of the men were down with fever and ague, prevalent on that swampy ground in the autumn. Then Osric came out in a new light; he had gone with Father Alfred often to visit the sick, and he knew something of the remedies for these attacks.

The hardy sea-loving Danes believed their sickness due to the Deity Whose shrines they had destroyed, and they mistrusted Osric's herbs. But as one or two recovered, they began to believe, and to take what he gave them. Lastly, and most severely,

Eric fell ill. The young man was of delicate frame, the rough, half-raw food, the continual drinking, the unhealthy camp, coupled with the heavy mists, at last caused him to collapse. Osric gave himself up to nursing him, and it was disinterested, for Osric really liked his master. Hunderik did remark one day, grimly, that it was "life for life."

However, Eric pulled through the worst, and the first sharp frosts seemed to revive him. Hunderik's gratitude was very deep, indeed had Osric chosen to give up Christianity he would have been made Eric's equal. But little as the Saxon thought about it, he could not give it up, so he remained in his old position.

Amongst the spoils were many leaves of manuscript, and some of these had found their way into Hunderik's hut. During Eric's convalescence, when he was captious and irritable, Osric had to amuse him. His resources were not many—a tale or two about S. Cuthbert and Bede, and S. Guthlac, the Crowland patron, all of which Eric voted very dull. The rough metrical story of King David answered better, also the story of the Passion in the same rhyme. Eric could appreciate self-sacrifice.

Then Osric picked up the loose sheets of manuscript, and read to Eric different Psalms. Familiar words to him, who had chanted them so often in the old days, so long ago, at Crowland.

One evening Eric was lying by the fire, and he suddenly gave a scrap of parchment to Osric, who was sitting by him. "What is this?" he asked.

Osric was tired, he had been trampling the crackling frosty reeds under foot, and in the ice cold water to get wild fowl for Eric. And he had come within sight of Crowland once more. The scene of blank desolation, under the winter sky, had stirred him to the depths, and he remembered it was Christmas time. Last Christmas he had been one of those at the midnight Mass, followed in the daylight by such feasting and joy. Father Alfred had come over to their cottage for their festival meal. And now, all but Father Alfred lay in the ashes of their ruined buildings, and Osric's home was desolate. When Eric spoke, he roused with a start, and took the torn, soiled scrap, and began to read in a low, hoarse voice, "*Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax.*"

"Hold! I do not understand," cried Eric, so Osric translated the words, still in a low husky tone.

"What does it mean?" asked Eric, lazily, stretching out his foot to the blazing fire.

"It is a hymn in the Sacred Service," answered Osric.

"What! to thy GOD? In earth peace—that is a shaveling's faith," grumbled Eric. "Love friends, hate enemies, that is a man's belief."

"We are taught to love our enemies," said Osric.

"Love enemies!" said the young Dane, in such utter surprise that Osric laughed. "You do not love us?" he added.

"Thou art not my enemy, Eric Hunderikson," said Osric, quietly.

"Nay, *we* are friends; but we Northmen have destroyed your homes, your holy places, your men, aye, and your women and little children. Can you Saxons love us after that?" Eric raised his eyes to his friend, as he put his question, and Osric hesitated.

"We *ought* to," he said.

There was a pause, then Eric asked, suddenly, "Did thy father believe that?"

Osric's face flushed a dusky, shamed colour. Never had he forgotten that his father was a traitor to the kind protectors of generations of their family. "He had learnt what I have," he answered at last.

"So all Christians are not faithful. But, Osric, thou art dull. Best sleep." And Eric, yawning, threw himself on his couch.

But Osric did not sleep; he little guessed, as he lay face downwards, that Eric was not asleep, either. He was watching Osric, and listening to the bitter misery of that vigil of desolation. But Eric never told Osric that he had heard the broken words of prayer that had returned to his lips in his hour of dire need.

CHAPTER VI.

"Spots of blackness in creation to make its colours felt."
RUSKIN.

CHRISTMAS Day was a bitter frost, with an icy east wind cutting over the fens. To the Danes it was positive life, the dry keen air being what they were used to. Eric scorned to feel the cold, although he really did so, after his long illness.

As Osric woke in the tardy dawn, Eric looked at him curiously after his long vigil. He stood up somewhat drowsily: a fine-looking young man, and as he stretched himself, his broad shoulders, and fine head set with yellow curls, made Eric think of Balder the Beautiful. But Osric's eyes were heavy, and a stern sadness had settled on his face after the first waking. They were alone; Hunderik and the main body had moved south, leaving a small guard only with Eric. There was, alas! no fear of any molestation from the country-side.

"Osric, to-morrow I shall join my father," said Eric, when Osric had awakened thoroughly. "Knowest thou the way to reach the place where he may be?"

"No; I know nothing beyond here."

"Well, no matter. We can find our way; no one will molest us," laughed Eric.

Osric's brow darkened: he was in no mood to endure even a jesting word as to his country's weakness. However, he only said, "Shall I tell Thun to prepare? and may I have to-day to—to visit Crowland again?"

He spoke with a greater assumption of humility than he usually showed, and Eric answered briefly, "Yes; tell Thun to come to me. Then go, but be back by dark."

Osric bowed, and walked out of the hut. He gave the message to Thun, and then, selecting a short boar spear as a weapon, strode through the encampment, and took the well-known track to Crowland. The wind blew strongly, and, to Osric's practised eyes, the frost showed signs of breaking. Even in these days of drainage and cultivation the fens in winter are often bleak and dreary; then it was a wild waste of water, marsh, and islet, with the dried reeds and bent grass rustling in the wind.

Osric strode on with mixed feelings. He was soon at Crowland, but as he crossed the shallow ice-bound stream he saw figures moving about amongst the half-ruined huts. He was sure there was no one to mind about, so he pushed on. Through the ruins he scrambled, till he emerged on the open space before the abbey west front. A knot of men and women stood there, who stared, rather terrified at the sight of an armed man. Osric had grown taller and older-looking, and was very unlike the young abbey

serf. He stood still a moment surveying the half-familiar scene; the others also paused, and there was silence.

Then they whispered together, and one, a rough boorish man, came forward, saying, "Is it *thou*, Osric, son of Osbert the traitor?"

Osric started, both at the recognition and the tone of deadly animosity. "It is I, Edwy," he answered, quietly.

"What dost thou here? Dost bring *thy* friends, those cursed Danes, to finish the work thy father began," cried Edwy, passionately.

The dozen or so of men and women came nearer, none too friendly to him. Osric for a moment gripped his spear, then his expression changed, and he said, sadly, "I do not wonder thou dost suspect me, Edwy. But I have come on this blessed Christmas Day to visit my—my home, before I leave this—for ever."

Edwy laughed, a sullen grim kind of sound. "Fairly spoken, Osric, but we trust not thy father's son. But for him we might have been in peace and content. Aye! and the holy fathers not there in their graves. GOD rest them! Nay, go thy way, it is the holy season; there, we harm thee not. But leave us, ere the Holy Mass is once more celebrated."

Osric had controlled himself to a dogged composure, but at the last words he had sprung, as it were, to life. "To worship!" he cried. "Is It to be offered here now?"

"Aye, but——"

"For GOD'S sake, Edwy, *let* me pass," cried Osric, eagerly. "I have longed once more for worship; let me pass."

Despite his passionate pleading the angry ranks closed in: their hearts were too hardened by misfortune for pity. How it would have ended it is not possible to say, but a voice made them all pause.

"What is this about, my children?" it asked, and Osric sprang forward, as his old friend, Father Alfred, appeared.

"Father!" he cried, appealingly.

Father Alfred uttered an exclamation of surprise and pleasure, but then he repeated his question. Many voices answered him, all affirming that Osric, son of a traitor, should not enter the church. Father Alfred, being the son of a thane, had, by inheritance, the settled air of authority, which was his also by his ecclesiastical standing. He spoke now with biting severity. "So, men of Crowland, *this* is how ye treat the renewed privilege of the Holy Sacrament being given and shown to you—with anger and spite in your hearts, and on your lips. Osric, son of Osbert, is innocent, though his father erred in ignorance. GOD rest him! But"—and the Priest turned his eyes, steel-blue with righteous anger, on the conscience-struck company—"ask yourselves if you are fit to keep the Feast of Peace with such anger at your hearts. Go to the church, and pray for better hearts. Be content that *I*, your father in GOD, say that Osric is to worship, nay, more, if I see fit, that he will attend me at GOD'S Altar. Now go!"

The crowd dispersed, some with backward and angry glances to where Osric and the Priest stood. As soon as they were alone Osric dropped on his knees in silent misery.

"Nay, rise up," said Father Alfred, kindly. "Take this unworthy spite not so to heart, Osric. I have much to tell thee of thy mother." Osric sprang to his feet, his face all eager question. Father Alfred made him sit on a block of wood near by, and then, taking his own seat, began, "Thou knowest we were to go to Lincoln. Thy mother and Edric went bravely on. Alas! on reaching Lincoln it was desolate even as this. The Danes had been there already. For miles round all was blazing homesteads, and murdered men and women and children, save where a miserable remnant lurked in the swamps. Ah! my son, 'tis no wonder men begin to cry for a leader; would to GOD we had one. We went on to Beccinghame, my father's house, when a party of Danes met us and took us prisoners."

"My mother, too?" cried Osric, his face paling.

"Yes. Her they took southward with Edric; I marvel thou didst not see her. Me they took to the sea, but, by the mercy of GOD, I escaped the second day, and went home. I found it deserted; all had *fled*. So I came here; ruined though it is, it is the only home I have. I daily say my office, and now a few have come round me to help me in the offering of the Sacrifice."

"Would I could stay here," sighed Osric. "But my service is my master's."

"Are they kind to thee?"

"Yes, father. Eric is a friend I have naught to complain of. He loves stories of the Faith."

"Thou mayst win his soul to CHRIST, Osric; then, indeed, thy work is blessed. Hast thou confessed lately?"

"Nay, father."

"Come with me, then we can join in the service."

Osric gladly complied, and he poured out his misgivings, his forgettings, his sins to his kindly friend, who finally gave him absolution, which still gives comfort individually to many a sorely-burdened heart.

Then Osric rose, and to his joy was allowed to act as acolyte once more. There were no proper vestments; lights but of rush and fat, such as the people made for themselves; and the choir was roughly patched and roofed with reeds and grass. But Osric was happy at, on that great festival, once more receiving the Blessed Sacrament, and making his confession. The Gospel, read in the vernacular, was telling of the angelic visit to the shepherds, and the "peace and good-will" that Eric had puzzled over became again a reality to the young Saxon thrall.

After Mass was over he took his way to his old islet home. The thatched wattled hut was in ruins, the grass was long and rank and sodden, and the winter wind howled dismally over the deserted spot.

"Behold your house is left unto you desolate" might have been written over this once homely and

homelike place. Only the rough wooden cross stood by the long grass-covered mounds, and a robin, in scarlet and russet, sang on one of the arms in a momentary gleam of winter sunlight.

Osric stood motionless, taking in the bitterness of loneliness. Once southward he never expected to come to Crowland again. He knew that Eric might stay further south, and where Eric was, Osric must be; and the desolation of all here helped him to endure the break better, especially as the only relative he had left, his mother, was apparently in the south.

It was in a very grave, taciturn mood that he returned to take his mid-day meal with Father Alfred before starting home. He, however, roused up after a while, and told of his life and of the horrible tortures that were sometimes practised, not often, as Eric could not endure them. He, Osric, was a privileged person, and was never interfered with. He told also how Eric questioned him, and how he was allowed to tell him stories of the Catholic Faith.

And Father Alfred made answer, "It is a work given thee by the Blessed GOD. May be that is why we were harried, and the brethren martyred, that this one soul should be won for CHRIST."

"But, father!" cried Osric, opening his big blue eyes very wide, "would the saints allow the holy fathers to be martyred for the sake of one soul?"

"The King of saints was killed for our souls, Osric. But, my son, thou must depart. It will be dusk soon."

Osric rose, but fell on his knees. "Bless me, father," he cried, almost in the words of the son of Isaac, "and pray for me."

Father Alfred laid his maimed right hand on the tangled hair of the bent head, not so very much younger than his own. "May GOD and His saints bless thee, my son," he said, solemnly. "Keep faithful to what thou knowest to be the right way."

And, with the blessing in his ears, and his friend's kindly embrace, Osric turned back to his life in the Danish camp.

"Well, Osric, hast been to thy home again?" asked Eric, as Osric entered the hut and flung himself down by the fire silently. He only grunted a response, and Eric went on, "And to thy shavelings' church? It was as we left it?"

"Nay, there was worship there. 'Tis a holy feast day," growled Osric, forgetting that to reveal Father Alfred's presence might be dangerous.

"Worship! The shavelings are dead," said Eric, puzzled.

Then Osric recollected, and said, hastily, "Thou wouldst not understand, Eric."

"Nay, that I would not. But, Osric, had they forgotten thee or thy father's work there?"

"They remembered, so did I," answered Osric, with a keen bitter pain in his voice.

"Well, we shall be quit of them soon. We leave to-morrow at daybreak," said Eric, with a yawn. "Sleep now, Osric." Suiting the action to the

words, Eric rolled over on his side, and was soon fast asleep.

Osric thought he should not sleep, but the first thing he was aware of was the bustle in the cold grey twilight, as the camp was struck next morning.

CHAPTER VII.

"There is a destiny which shapes our ends,
Rough hew them how we will."

SHAKESPEARE.

WITH East Anglia as the base of operations, the Danes spread far and wide over the surrounding country, leaving no church or monastery, hardly a homestead standing.

It made Osric's heart burn with intolerable pain to see the wreck and ruin, but he felt he must stay with Eric, who treated him like a brother, and always contrived that he should never be of any plundering expedition. But Eric was of more refined intuitions than the others, his mother was of a half-Latin origin. Eric was of tall, broad build, but his thoughts and feelings were far above the rest, and he was almost ashamed of it. It really revolted him to see the wholesale slaughter by his followers, albeit the mad blood fever dominated sometimes.

The Danes had reached Ipswich, and had been joined by another band from the Orwell. The camp was pitched on one of the hills overlooking the river, and the usual earthwork thrown up round it. From thence the Danes made their forays, sometimes, but rarely, bringing in prisoners. One March evening

ERIC, THE DANE.

"On his saddle in front of him was a child, a girl of ten or so, her golden hair streaming over her roughly held form, her frightened blue eyes staring up at her captor."

Page 135.

Osric was standing looking over the wall to the west, where the sun was setting gloriously. A dull, sullen column of smoke was rising from another line of hills: a sure sign of a successful raid on a defenceless farm or village. Presently a loud shout betokened the return of the party, headed by Eric, apparently in as Berserker a mood as his followers.

On his saddle (the Danes had annexed many horses lately) in front of him was a child, a girl of ten or so, her golden hair streaming over her roughly held form, her frightened blue eyes staring up at her captor.

As they rode in Eric shouted, "Come here, Osric, and see my prize. She is mine by right of capture." He flung the child off his horse, and Osric caught her, unhurt. She clung to him vehemently, and Eric dismounted. "Such mead, such ale!" he cried. "By Odin! I am fit for anything to-night," he added, clutching his friend's arm. Osric thought him drunk with ale and mead, and Eric turned to say, "Bring me the other prisoner."

Osric saw a thin, bent old man in the rags of priestly dress, but torn and marked with blood. Osric stepped up to him. "Come with me," he said, kindly.

"Nay," shouted the rest. "Baulk us not of the *Rist örn*."

Osric's face paled as he heard the terrible torture reserved for the Saxon Priest, but Eric strode back to the excited men. "Curs!" he said, "he is

mine; bring him with the child, Osric." Osric gladly obeyed, and when they got into the hut Eric's manner completely changed. He divested himself of his stained mail coat and helmet, and then looked at Osric, with a quiet laugh. "Thou thoughtest me 'fey,' didst thou not, Osric? I will tell thee all, but first ask the prisoners questions for me. Who is the man?"

Osric asked in Saxon, hardly understood at first, for the Priest was a Celt, but on the repetition he answered, "Brian, Priest of S. Cuthbert's yonder."

Osric translated the answer, and Eric nodded. "I thought so," he remarked. "I found him kneeling in the church, and he did not fight, so I claimed him a prisoner. I frightened him, for I was obliged to act as if I was like the others. Now, who is the child? She is like my sister who went to the homes of the blessed."

"She is the daughter of Ethelbert, the thane," answered the Priest for her. "Her father lies in his smoking home, his wife by him. Her brothers are with the Levies, and she had run to me in the church."

Osric's eyes saddened, and he held out his hand to the shrinking, but tearless child. "What is thy name?" he asked.

She looked up in surprise at the familiar language, and replied at once, "Hilda; the Lady Abbess of Whitby was my mother's godmother." Osric started, it was as if his sister was there, and he held her fast.

"What shall I do with them, Osric?" asked Eric, looking at his captives perplexedly. Osric shook his head; he dared not suggest release, he knew it would cause a fearful rage against them. But the idea of torture was horrible. "I think she must go to Denmark as a slave," began Eric. Hilda burst out into tears; she did not understand the words, but she thought they sounded severe. "Does she know what I said?" asked Eric, uneasily.

Osric asked her, and she sobbed out a "No"—but she wanted to go home.

"There is no home, my child," put in the Priest.

"Eric, art going to send out the man to us?" said a voice, and Thun put his great shaggy head into the hut.

"Yes, presently," said Eric, adding hastily to Osric, "We *must* do something, or they will have him."

"Father, take my cloak, it is dusk. Slip out there," pointing to a large gap in the wattled hut. "Go, for GOD'S sake."

"Thou art a Christian?" cried Father Brian, pausing in blank surprise.

"Yes, indeed—but go!" Osric pulled the cloak over his head, and pushed the bent figure to the hole. The hut was against the wall, and it was a mere easy scramble over. The Danes kept little watch, for they were safe from reprisals.

"But the child—she cannot remain," said the Priest. "I cannot take her?" This last was interrogatory.

"No, old man; go thy way. Stay! thou art a shaveling?" said Eric, abruptly.

"He is a Priest," said Osric.

"Thy 'Priest' can make thee man and wife then, and so save the child."

"I!" cried Osric. "I am not free, and she a thane's daughter."

Eric laughed. "Free thou art. Wilt do it?"

Osric paused, looked at the child and the Priest. "I have no rings," he said.

"As to that," and Eric drew open his inner tunic, and produced two gold ones, evidently the spoils of war. "Be quick," he said. "Hark to the noise." So Osric explained in a few words to the Priest, urging the need of haste. So they were married in the briefest possible manner, Hilda's age being no barrier at that period. "Now go," and Eric pushed Father Brian with no gentle hand to the wall.

He still hesitated. "Wilt swear to keep her honourably?" he said to Osric.

"I swear it on the Holy Rood," answered the young man, solemnly.

So the Priest vanished into the darkness, and Eric, striding to the door, flung it open. "Now enter!" he cried.

"Art thou mad, Eric? They will discover," cried Osric, catching his arm.

"Let them if they can," laughed Eric, excitedly.

Thun and some of the others came in. Hilda cowered behind Osric, and Eric stood easily on one

side, a smile on his face. "Where is the man?" cried Thun, as his eyes grew accustomed to the light.

"Where is he? Why, here," said Eric, coolly.

"Here! he is *not* here," said Thun, puzzled.

Eric surveyed the place with an air of intense surprise. "Not here!" he cried. "He was here as I called thee, Thun. See here! he has escaped by this slit," pointing to one exactly opposite to that by which the Priest had really gone. "Fool! he is in the camp now. He must have gone to the south. Go, search for him."

Most of them rushed out, but Thun caught sight of the child. "The child is here," he cried, stepping forward.

"No torture to a woman whilst Eric Hunderikson leads you," said he, fiercely. "Besides," he added, "I have given her to Osric here. So he alone has her." The young Dane, grumbling but obedient, departed. Hilda was sobbing with terror, as much at her new guardian as her danger, which she hardly understood. Osric stood perplexed, wondering where to dispose his embarrassing charge. "Well, Osric, did I well?" asked Eric, when they were alone.

"Yes, indeed," answered Osric, in a dream.

"Now for the child. Come hither," said Eric, putting out his great broad hand. Hilda shrank back. "Tell her I will not hurt her." Osric spoke reassuringly to her, and Hilda crept up, *nearly* as afraid of one as of the other. Eric took her hand, and looked down into her blue eyes. "She is like thee, Osric," he said.

"She is like my sister," said Osric.

"And mine. Listen, little one," and Eric, in his broken Saxon, told Hilda how, that to save her life, she was Osric's wife.

"Cannot I go home?" sobbed Hilda. There is Eadgith and Cuthbert, and the dogs, and my little fawn. Let me go, thane, and I will pray for thee at S. Cuthbert's."

"Pray for me? That is for women to do; we warriors go out to fight, and you pray to the gods for us," said Eric, holding her on his knee.

"Art thou a warrior? Thou art young and fair of face like David," said Hilda, quite at her ease.

"Who is David?" asked Eric.

"He was a king, but before that he was a shepherd, and fought a lion and a bear. And Father Brian says we must all fight our lions if we follow the CHRIST."

"Fight a lion!" laughed Eric. "How canst thou fight, child?"

"Not a *real* lion, but our sins, thou knowest, when we do what is wrong; Father Brian says we all can do it."

"Do what?" asked Eric.

"Fight our sins. He told my brothers when they joined the Levies that they were more glad to fight the wicked, cruel Danes than their sins. It is easier to fight the Northmen than sin."

"What sins?" Eric spoke eagerly. Osric and he were listening intently, as the childish voice went on in her unconscious mission work.

"Why, getting drunk and beating the serfs, and *once* Ethelbert killed a serf by beating him. *That* was a murder, and Ethelbert had to do penance. Murder is a fearful thing, thou knowest." Eric jumped up, pushing the child away, his face working strangely. Hilda stood looking at him a moment, then ran up to him. "Kind man," she said. "Thou art too kind to murder anyone."

Eric looked down at his hands, which, like his dress, were stained with blood, perhaps even that of the child's parents. "Take her, Osric," he said, hoarsely. "Leave me alone."

Osric led the child out to a low wall, where he sat down with her. She soon slept in the shelter of his arm, and he sat on in the spring darkness, the warm weight of Hilda seeming to thaw the chill that sorrow and disgrace had left on his heart.

The watch-fires gleamed not far from him, and the sleeping forms of the Danes clustered round. Only occasional bursts of rough laughter came from them, for the watchers were few; they had little to fear from the country round.

How long Osric sat there he did not know, when a figure stood before him, and Eric's voice said, "Be not startled, Osric, but listen." He put his horn to his lips, and blew a sharp blast. In an instant the camp was astir: men seizing their weapons, and rushing to the walls. Osric, startled, despite the assurance he had received, was dragged passively by Eric into the light of the nearest watch-fire.

"Northmen!" cried the young Dane, "sons of Odin, hear me, I, thy chief's son!"

"We hear thee, Eric, son of Hunderik," they shouted in answer.

"Listen, then. Osric the Saxon is no longer my servant, he is as my brother, and none shall gainsay him. He will not leave our camp. Moreover, this child is his wife, and none shall molest or own her, save by his will. Sons of Odin, do you agree?"

"We agree" they answered, but not with the same unanimity as before.

"That is well. Osric, this is my will; thou wilt agree?" Eric held out his hand to Osric.

"I agree, and I thank thee; I will be true to thee, Eric the Dane, as thou hast been true to me," said Osric, rather huskily.

They were a noble pair: Osric with his solid Saxon fairness, and half-Danish dress, one arm holding the still drowsy child, herself a model of English beauty, the other hand holding that of Eric, who towered a head above him, his shaggy hair of a tawny fairness, his massive shoulders and limbs marking his giant build, and yet with features more delicate than Osric, and with a face white and stern in the ruddy firelight.

The men shouted again: these scenes were dramatic enough to please them, and, crowding round Osric, they hailed him as a friend and companion.

CHAPTER VIII.

"And that same prayer doth teach us all
To render the deeds of mercy."

SHAKESPEARE.

IT was a bitterly cold night of early spring, the moon shone down clearly on the field where the Raven-standard was no longer reared in victory, for the power of the Danes was gone for ever; Alfred, the Saxon overlord, had crushed it on the field of Ethendune. Hundreds of warriors on both sides lay there dead or dying, and from the Saxon camp came sounds of feasting and laughter.

Amongst the bodies lay two together: the one dead, an elderly man dressed handsomely, with his head crushed by a battle-axe. Beside him was a young man dressed equally well, and he, although severely wounded, was able to struggle into a sitting posture. Lights were gleaming about the field, and the young man made a shift to get his battle-axe, for they might be plunderers. However, a figure in a monk's habit came over the dead and wounded, comforting, binding wounds, absolving, and helping. Behind him came another—a layman—at sight of whom the wounded man called out, "Osric!"

Osric sprang forward. "Eric! Thank GOD thou art not slain," he cried.

"Sorely wounded, but not to death," said Eric, seizing Osric's ready arm, and dragging himself upon his feet. His wounds, severe gashes, were bound up by the monk, who was Father Alfred, and then he was able, with Osric's help, to leave the field of battle. "Whither wilt thou take me?" he asked. "All is lost."

"Hilda gave me no peace till I found thee out. She and the babes are not far away. Wilt go to her?"

"I will."

The seven years since Osric's marriage had been mainly years of discomfort to him. The Danes, emboldened by success, had devastated everywhere. Osric was free and well treated, so was Hilda, for Eric kept his word, but he was cruelly taunted on his countrymen's weakness, till his slow rage made him long to fight his mocking companions. He hailed with joy the rumours of King Alfred's stand, and begged to be allowed to quit the Danes. Fight for them he would not, to fight against them he felt impossible, so at last he was allowed to go. He settled near Reading, and for months had not seen Eric. A second child had been born to them within the last month or so, their first having been born five years after their marriage. Father Alfred had joined Alfred in his wanderings, and so had at last come across Osric again.

"Where is Thun and the others?" asked Osric, as they rested under a tree.

"They are dead. They died round us, scorning

to fly. O Osric, we are beaten at last," said Eric, sadly.

"Thy father is dead?" asked Osric again, letting the last obvious remark slide.

"Didst thou not see him on the field yonder? And my mother had given him a charm so that none could harm him." Eric was very well inclined indeed to the Christian Faith, but his Northern blood clung to superstitions with tenacity.

"He was a good man in his way," remarked Osric. "But come, Eric, the wolves will be gathering; we must be in shelter." About half a mile further on a light gleamed through the trees, and a hut came in sight. A tall, slender girl stood in the doorway. "Hilda, here is Eric," cried Osric.

"I am glad. But thou art wounded," she cried, as the light shone on the tall, exhausted figure.

"Yes, he is wounded, but thy care will soon ease his troubles," said Osric, cheerfully.

Hilda was now a beautiful girl of seventeen, upright as a willow, with masses of golden hair, and bright blue eyes. Her sweet temper and accommodating nature made her a true helpmeet to Osric, who was given to fits of depression.

She made Osric place his friend on a couch of skins, and gave him milk and a bowl of savoury broth. She was glad to see him sleep afterwards, and then she came up to her husband, who was eating his supper by the fire. "Is all lost for them?" she asked.

Osric nodded. "All," he answered, briefly.

"And Hunderik?"

"Is dead. He was a noble man, but a brute because he knew no better. Ah, Hilda, thou and I have a black reckoning against the Danes," said Osric, rising with a weary yawn.

"They were kind to thee, Osric," said Hilda, stooping to pick up her baby—another Hilda. "See," she added, after a pause, "the babe grows more like thee daily."

Osric looked down on the tiny red face. "I see no likeness to anyone," he laughed, with masculine scorn.

"O dost thou not? She has thy eyes, and her hair will grow like thine," said Hilda.

"At all events Alfred is like thee," said Osric. "I am glad of that, my wife," and he kissed the fair face so close to his own.

"He is like my brother Ethelbert. But, Osric, what will Eric do?"

"I know not. But, Hilda, we must rest; it is late."

Eric's wounds kept him prisoner some days; sad as he was, he was contented enough with Hilda and her children.

At the Peace of Wedmore he was present: worn, thin, and dejected-looking, but yet a magnificent man from his height and the vigour of his seven-and-twenty years.

He followed Guthrun, the leader, and, like him, accepted the Christian Faith, but with greater sincerity and knowledge. It was no new thing to

him, and he had long wished for Baptism. Father Alfred baptised him, and Osric and Hilda were sponsors. Finding him really intelligent and anxious to live a civilised life, King Alfred granted him land near Stamford, and thither he and Osric, Hilda and the children went.

Osric's first desire was to get to Crowland, and there he found the monks returned, and chant and psalm rising as before. Memories haunted him as he was at Mass, and heard the long roll of departed brethren read out from the diptych. He could have fancied his mother was there, but then he smiled as he mentally added her name and his sister's to the list.

As the congregation streamed out a bent, feeble, middle-aged woman followed him: she leaning on the arm of a lad of about sixteen. She came near Osric, but did not speak.

"Dost need an alms, good mother?" he asked, kindly.

She flung back her hood, gazing at him with straining eyes. "Osric, dost thou not remember me?" she cried.

Osric started, stared, hesitated, and looked again, "Mother!" he cried.

"My boy! my son!" she sobbed, rushing forward, so that he put out his arm to save her falling. "My boy, after all these years," she said, fondly, after the first long, silent embrace.

"Whom hast thou with thee?" asked Osric, returning the loving gaze—and indicating the boy.

"It is little Edric. He has been with me all these years."

"Edric! Time flies; I knew thee not. Mother, thou must tell me all; I have much to tell thee. Come home with me," said Osric.

"I must not leave Edric," she said.

"Nay, he can come with us." So by slow stages by boat and cart Osric brought his mother to the homestead. On the way he learnt their story, and he told his.

They had been taken southward from Lincoln, and had found temporary prison with the Danes, who had settled in Essex. They were not badly treated, but both had had to work. Eventually they were taken back to Denmark on the return of some of the Danes home, and there they were, curiously enough, sent to Brunhilda, wife to Hunderik, where they had fairly comfortable years.

Brunhilda soon made out that Osric, Gertha's son, was with her son Eric, and it made a bond between them.

When Brunhilda died, which she did, not knowing of her husband's death, she had begged that Gertha and Edric should be sent home again.

Much against the will of the burg it was done, for the Danes dared not offend so powerful a man as Hunderik (they did not know of his death). They were landed on the east coast, and made their slow way to Crowland, the only homelike place they knew.

Eric heard the story of his mother's death without

comment; at the end he said, sadly, "I would I could have seen her again, but it is the will of the good GOD. Thy mother abides here, Osric?"

"I wish it. Hilda will care for her, and Edric will help us," said Osric.

"And *I* wish it. Osric, could we not build a church, and Father Alfred can minister to us? So can we best remember the dead and living."

Eric had his wish, and the little church was built, partly of wood, partly of the local stone, and dedicated to S. Cuthbert, and there Father Alfred daily offered the Holy Sacrifice. There daily came Eric, and after a while his wife with him, and Osric, with Hilda and their five children (for Eric, Osric, and Gertha completed their family), and Edric and their men, in full belief of the efficacy of that service to give them the strength and comfort for their life of daily toil, and its pleasures and anxieties.

And who can say they were not wiser than many now, who think those ages dark, and narrow-minded?

"PRO ECCLESIA DEI."

"A duty, an absolute duty governs man from the cradle upwards. . . . A duty towards his country, towards humanity, and above all towards the Church—the Church which, rightly understood, is but the home of the Universal Family."—LAMENNAIS.

"PRO ECCLESIA DEI."

CHAPTER I.

"Character is centrality—the impossibility of being displaced and overset."—EMERSON.

"CONFUNDANTUR et revereantur simul, qui quærunt animam meam: ut auferant eam. Convertantur retrorsum et revereantur qui volunt mihi mala."

So chanted the choir at Canterbury Cathedral, on S. Nicholas' Day, in the year 1163. The Boy-Bishop had knelt whilst Mass was sung, and at the conclusion, at the choir gates, he stood, and the boyish voice rang down the nave in the "*Ite missa est*," the usual dismissal, from which the service got its name of Mass. He was a tall, slim boy of fourteen, with dark hair and eyes, and delicate features. He was a chorister still, and one of Archbishop Becket's pages. The popular love of the Archbishop was such that a decided murmur of approval came up to the lad as he stood above the crowded nave, seething, as even he well knew, with somewhat perilous rebellion against the civil power.

Godfrey à Becket was the Archbishop's cousin, and therefore his election was a great proof of loyalty to the Archbishop. Presently the boy turned, his acolytes picked up the edge of his cope, and the procession moved back to the sacristy, where Godfrey was disrobed, and all were dismissed.

To the Archbishop's lodging in the palace did Godfrey go, glad enough to get free of his heavy vestments, though he wore violet in monastic fashion, and, like all choristers, was tonsured, though he did not intend to take further Orders.

He rushed headlong up the steps, and paused before entering the long low hall. Voices were raised in angry words, and as the lad lifted the curtain he saw the Archbishop pacing impatiently up and down, his fiery gestures and angry words contrasting oddly with the sober, peaceful surroundings.

On the floor lay a slip of parchment, which a young man was just stooping to pick up—a young man dressed in a blue tunic edged with embroidery, a heavy fur-trimmed mantle of brown on his shoulders, his sword depending from a finely-enamelled belt, in which was stuck his silver-hilted dagger. He was the only son of Sir William de Eynsford, to the Church on whose land Becket had just sent a Priest by virtue of diocesan rights. The knight was a King's man, and objected very strongly to the appointment. But the Archbishop, as yet, was too powerful to be offended, so Sir William had sent his son, once a scholar at

Canterbury, to negotiate a change. Becket had received Eustace de Eynsford kindly, and the young man fed on hopes of a successful issue to his mission. But when the letter was presented and read, the hot temper of the Archbishop blazed up. He had flung the letter down, and was storming away when Godfrey entered. "Ah!" he cried, as his cousin stood in the doorway. "Read that, Godfrey. S. Mary help us! Thou hast a voice now, give it to my cousin, Eustace de Eynsford."

Eustace obeyed, a hot angry flush dyeing his face, though he forebore to speak. Godfrey read:

"To my Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, from Sir William de Eynsford, greeting. Touching the Priest thou hast sent to minister here, I mislike him. I hold all the rights of this my manor of Eynsford, under the seal of the King. Thou, my lord, hast power over our souls, not over our bodies. Therefore wilt thou recall this Stephen of Tenterden, for I like him not, and I have a more worthy Priest to put in his place?

"Given at my Castle of Eynsford, on the Feast of S. Clement, 1163."

Godfrey à Becket read this rather peremptory epistle in silence.

"Well, what sayest thou?" asked Becket, impatiently, as he looked up.

Godfrey was only just fourteen, but he knew his cousin's temper well, and he answered at once, "If

I were my Lord Archbishop I should hold to my rights."

Becket strode up to the boy. "*Ex ore infantium et parvulorum adhuc lactentium*," he exclaimed. "That is my answer to thy father, Eustace."

"Is that all thy answer?" demanded Eustace, sharply. "Wilt not thou remove this Priest?"

"I bandy not words with a stripling like thee. Only know, Sir Squire, that to me is given the rights of the Church in England, and those rights I would not give up, if I could." There was something dignified in Becket's words and look that checked the other's passion; he stood still, looking rather shamefaced. "Go thy way, my son," went on the Archbishop, more softly. "Godfrey, attend Eustace to the refectory, and I will join thee."

The two lads went off together, Godfrey admiring with all a boy's ardour the other's manliness, though he was only six years the elder. "'Tis a pity thou sayest so much to the Archbishop," remarked he, as they went along the stone passage.

Eustace laughed. "Why?" he asked.

"Because he is already angered. He says the Church must hold her own."

"My father meant to do well. Does my lord know what this Stephen is?" said Eustace.

"I know not, save that he was here as a chanter," said Godfrey.

"Didst thou know him?"

"I have seen him."

"Not to know, then? Well, he is but a villein who got his benefit of clergy, and can scarce say the words of the offices. And as for Confession—S. Edward!" finished Eustace, with a shrug.

"My Lord Archbishop knows not all this, surely?" said Godfrey, rather scandalised.

The other shrugged again, he was in no mood to be lenient to Becket. "But," he added, suddenly, "thou hast some power now. Thou canst alter this, an thou wilt."

"I can do nothing against the Archbishop," said Godfrey, flushing scarlet.

"I forgot thou art his relative," said Eustace, sullenly. "Well, so be it; my Lord Archbishop must be careful."

"The Archbishop will do as he thinks fit," answered Godfrey, too much of a boy not to instantly resent the warning. "I will thank thee, Sir Squire, to mind thy manners in his lordship's palace."

"Sayest thou this, thou malapert boy. By S. Mary, I could strike thee dead," flared up Eustace, his hand on his sword.

"Strike! but I will never unsay my words," was the spirited answer. But Godfrey put his back against the wall, for he was, of course, totally unarmed.

"What is this, Godfrey—forgetting thy manners and thy calling?" The stern words came from the Archbishop, who, unheard, had come on the scene of difference, attended by his secretary. Godfrey

looked rather ashamed, and Eustace was young enough to colour hotly.

"My lord, he maligned thy power," murmured Godfrey.

"And if he did? I heard his words. They are not worth thinking of, Godfrey," said Becket, a smile lighting up the delicate features, oddly framed by his fair hair, for his eyes were of dark, southern brilliancy. "It was but half what others, who ought to know better, say or think."

"My lord," and Eustace spoke honestly, "I *do* care for thee, but my father has trouble with this Priest. He is not fit for his office."

"The Blessed Sacrifice is not less powerful in unworthy hands, else we should all be damned," said the Archbishop. Eustace was silenced, he could not discuss the matter. "Come, Eustace, thou art young enough to be hungry," went on Becket, kindly. "Leave such questions for wiser, older heads than thine, and be my guest."

Eustace followed perforce into the refectory, where, after a short Latin grace, the abundant meal began. The Archbishop was abstracted, although he tried to appear at ease, and occasionally he was gloomy. He knew well the struggle before him, and with the dogged obstinacy of his Saxon forefathers he determined to fight, inch by inch, the King's dictation. He ate and drank but little, for since his promotion to the Archbishopric he had been very austere with himself, even to parsimony. This, his enemies said, was from a mere love of

THE ARCHBISHOP AT PRAYER.

"The Archbishop knelt, the tears streaming down his face, and sobs shaking his powerful frame."

Page 159.

notice and ostentation of humility, but fairer critics have seen that it was a real desire for self-mortification, for there is no doubt that Becket's southern blood loved brilliant shows. The long meal came to an end, and, grace having been sung by the choristers, the Archbishop rose. All waited until he had gone, followed by none, for he had signed away all from him. He hurried to his own room, and bidding the little page there wait outside, and allow none to enter, the great Archbishop was alone: a man, and no longer a statesman. His passions were deep and strong, and he gave way to them. He strode up and down, muttering, clutching the air, shaking his fists at an imaginary foe, now sinking on to a seat in despair, now again pacing the room. Stone walls and floor deadened all sounds, and he knew he could not be heard. He was warring with himself and his personal love to the King, against that absolute duty to the Church that he had sworn to uphold. At last a ray of sunlight flashed across the Crucifix that hung against the wall, the great wooden figure on the stone Cross standing out in distinct light. Becket stood motionless for a moment looking at it, then the silent monitor did its work, and the Archbishop knelt, the tears streaming down his face, and sobs shaking his powerful frame. He had chosen, for good or ill—chosen the path of plain duty to the Church he loved so well against, if need be, the King, whose hand had given him all he had, and whose love and confidence he had possessed since

early manhood. Becket's principle was steady and right, though at times his hot temper got the better of his reason in his practice.

Meanwhile, Godfrey was left to entertain Eustace de Eynsford, who was not to start homewards till dawn of the next day. The winter daylight was too short to allow of his riding late in those days, scarcely yet recovered from the civil war of King Stephen's time. They wandered to the hawks and hounds which Becket kept for his secular household till daylight closed in, and Godfrey had to repair to his own quarters, leaving Eustace to yawn and dawdle.

Supper at five, and Compline ended the day, and after the latter, the Archbishop who had not been seen again, sent for Eustace. Some traces of the storm showed in the firmer set of the lips, the deeper furrows under the eyes, but he was calm. "Sit down, Eustace," he said, as the young man stood waiting. Eustace obeyed, fidgeting somewhat nervously with his dagger. "Seest thou this?" asked the Archbishop, holding up a strip of parchment.

"Yes, my lord," answered Eustace, meekly.

"It is to thy father."

"Thou wilt send away the Priest?" said Eustace, hopefully.

"No; I have written that my decree is final. I have the power in the Church in England, and I shall keep it. For King, noble, Priest, or villein I have but one answer. My authority comes from

GOD Himself, through His vice-regent on earth, and for none else do I care. *That* is my answer to thy father."

"The King *was* thy friend," ventured Eustace, rather awed.

"He was, and *is*, if so he will," said Becket, a shadow crossing his face. "But the Church comes before all earthly friends. Now fare thee well, my son. If we meet never again, remember Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, did what he believed to be his duty."

Silent and awed Eustace bowed his head to receive the parting blessing, and departed, next day starting for home at daybreak.

CHAPTER II.

"I have come to the conclusion that no two persons can talk properly together in the presence of a third person."
DEAN HOOK.

EUSTACE de Eynsford took nearly all the next day riding home. Until he reached Rochester he was on the good old Roman road, and he and his attendants rode safely on. There was a continual stream of traffic: parties of men-at-arms, on various errands, under different cognisances, or with none, these latter but mercenaries, ready to take service under any master; pilgrims and palmers to many holy places, and monks, travelling on foot, or on mules, as their standing or vows warranted them. It was a bright day, and, despite his uneasiness, Eustace was amused and interested by the life and stir of the road. After Rochester, guarded by its solid castle, he plunged into byeways, through woods, across heathy commons, pushing on rapidly, for the winter day was drawing in. However, he reached home safely—that small, square-built castle with its numerous wooden out-buildings clustering under the outer walls that stretched to the banks of a small river. The draw-bridge was not yet raised for the night, and Eustace clattered over it in supreme content at being at

home, and yet with some misgivings as to what his father would say. He swung himself from his tired horse, amid the greetings of the crowded court, just as the bell rang for supper at five. The glare of fire and torch nearly blinded him, when, escaping from the vociferous welcome of man and dog, he entered the hall.

"Ah, Eustace! Returned at last?" exclaimed a tall, dark-haired, slightly-made man of forty with, however, a bold forehead.

After due and respectful greeting to his parents Eustace hastened to wash the mud from his hands and face, and, as a traveller, received permission to be seated next his mother, instead of serving his father as a squire should. He devoured his supper with the healthy appetite of a young man, who had, moreover, kept fast all day. The party at the high table consisted of Sir William de Eynsford and his wife: a shrinking, timid, nonentity of a woman, who was desperately afraid of her hot-tempered lord, and was capable of lying from sheer cowardice. Of her two children her daughter resembled her most, and she was married to a young knight whose lands lay far west. Eustace was always kind to his mother, but he could not understand her fear of his father, for timidity had but little place in the pity of those days.

The only other person at the high table was the Priest, who, however, hardly merited the extreme wrath of Sir William. True, he was of Saxon origin, and therefore, to Normans, of lower rank;

but he was a short, thick-set young man, with a thick ring of ruddy-yellow hair and a freckled face, with wide-open grey eyes. And truly, young Stephen of Tenterden was absolutely ignorant. He was just in Priest's orders, and he had previously got his benefit of clergy by being favoured by the wife of the Lord of Tenterden. He was upright and sincere, but really incapable, as Eustace had averred to Becket. He was terribly afraid of his patron, though the knight was as ignorant as himself, or more so, for at least Stephen knew a little Latin. His very alarm made him blurt out remarks that seemed aggressive to the dictatorial, proud man, who, however, was too outwardly respectful of the Church's claims to deny the Saxon Priest a seat at the upper table.

Supper over, the Priest said grace, and withdrew, and the others drawing round the fire, Eustace was ordered to give his news. He produced the roll somewhat nervously, and gave it to his father.

"Read it, boy. Thou knowest I can scarce sign my name to a parchment," said Sir William, waving it away.

"Thou seest it is the Archbishop's seal?" said Eustace, holding it out. Such recognitions before a witness were necessary when signatures were not yet valid testimony of identification.

"Yes, yes, Eustace, it is right. Read on," answered Sir William, impatiently.

So Eustace began:

"To Sir William de Eynsford, peace and greeting.

"I, Thomas, by the grace of GOD and His holy saints, and by the power given me in this Church of England, do request thee, Sir William de Eynsford, to retain as Priest of the Church at Eynsford, Stephen de Tenterden, whom I, by the said power given unto me, have confirmed in, and conceded to, all the benefits and tithes of the said church, save those belonging to S. Augustine's Monastery in this our City of Canterbury. Should aught happen to the said Stephen of Tenterden, or he be molested in any way in the performance of the sacred offices, then be it known to thee, Sir William de Eynsford, that I shall, having full authority for the same, place thee and thy household under the ban of Holy Church, for the humbling of your souls, and for the increase of the spiritual power in this Church and realm.

"(Signed) THOMAS À BECKET,
"*Archbishop.*

"CANTERBURY,
"*The Feast of S. Nicholas, 1163.*"

This document was far worse than Eustace expected, and he was hardly surprised when his father, after gasping, muttering, almost choking with rage, suddenly burst out with, "By S. Mary, what *is* this? Holy Church, indeed! A miserable Saxon cur, scarce able to say a word. *I* submit? Nay! What care I for ban of 'Holy Church?'" This was uttered with as much contempt as was possible to infuse into a human voice.

"Nay, my lord, say not so," murmured his terrfied wife.

"Say not so!" he stormed. "Fool! *thou* canst snivel to thy *Priest*, thou canst truckle to thy *Archbishop* if thou wilt. I will to the King, and Thomas à Becket may see if such things can be endured."

"If we are patient, it will be well," whispered Dame Agatha.

"Patient!" laughed Sir William, scornfully. Then turning to his other squire, a thin, dark-faced, cruel-looking Gascon, he said, shortly, "Fetch the Priest."

"Not now," ejaculated Eustace, who was afraid that his father might, in his anger, resort to violence.

"Be silent, boy. I will do no hurt to him," said Sir William.

Somewhat reassured, Eustace stood by his mother's chair, and presently the Priest arrived. He well knew of the opposition to his appointment, and expected his *congé*. Great, therefore, was his astonishment when Sir William strode up to him with a brief, "Read that, Sir Priest, an thou canst."

Stephen coloured to the roots of his stiff yellow hair. He knew the others were watching his attempt at mastering the writing. He managed to get something of the sense, however, and returned it to his unwilling patron, with a bow, but wisely, in silence.

"Just wait till the King hears from my lips of this, then see if thou stayest here," said Sir William, nettled at his coolness.

The young Priest drew himself up with a touch of dignity. "It is not for King or noble to interfere with the Church," he answered, simply.

Sir William laughed scornfully, but he let it pass without remark or bluster, much to his son's satisfaction.

"Is that all thou wishest of me?" asked Stephen, still with that little touch of dignity, as if his office overcame his natural shyness. A nod answered him, and, stepping back a pace, he raised his hand. "*Benedicite*," he said.

Sir William touched his cap, Eustace removed his, and both he and his mother crossed themselves reverently.

"Strange!" muttered the knight as he sat down, gloomily, by the fire; "this Priest *is* able to silence me."

Whether this was intended for soliloquy or not was uncertain, but Dame Agatha, somewhat unwisely, spoke. "He is a good, and well-meaning youth," she said, in her timid, whining voice, which generally aggravated her husband.

"Be silent," he thundered. "He will not long enjoy the tithes of Eynsford."

"Father, a gleeman was in my company from Rochester. Wilt hear him, now thou has finished thy business?" remarked Eustace, with suspicious haste.

"Yes, Eustace, I am tired of these priestly subtilties. Bring in the gleeman."

So, like with Saul, the evil spirit departed from the proud, irascible Norman, as the gleeman sang of the days of Rollo, and then of love and beauty in the sunny South, ending with a merry hunting lilt, which has come down to us in the well-known "Come, lasses and lads."

"That is worth the hearing," cried the knight. "Here is money for thee, Sir Minstrel. And now to our rest, fair wife, come!"

Unusually cheerful was Sir William, and his wife and son rejoiced. Eustace did not go at once to the room he shared with the other squire, but turned to the tiny slip allotted to the Priest. He was at once admitted to the bare little place, of which a straw pallet, a small table, and two stools were the furniture. A Crucifix against the wall, a tiny reliquary under it, and a breviary on the table were the sole additions. The Priest was kneeling, but rose as Eustace entered. He looked somewhat surprised, for the young squire, though not actively hostile, was not friendly enough for private visits. Still more astonished was he when Eustace, reddening, said, "I crave pardon, father, for the violent words of to-night. My father has a prejudice which naught can remove. I have said this, as I have learnt such violence is not good."

"Hush! he is thy father. Thou art bound to respect him," said Father Stephen, bluntly. "But,"

he added, "I am glad to have thy friendship rather than thy hatred."

"I never hated thee," said Eustace, rather shamefacedly.

"What could I do?" burst out the young Priest, his natural feelings breaking bounds at last. "I was ordered to come here from Canterbury. Our Father Abbot brooks no hesitation. What have *I* done to be scorned and disliked, save that I am of Saxon blood. But my forefathers held Tenterden before the Normans came."

Eustace was utterly amazed by this outburst; he never thought the Priest had it in him. "Well," he said, apologetically, "I am thy friend, if thou wilt. As for thy birth, my father puts thee at the high table, where I could only be to-night as favoured. But hast thou ever seen the Archbishop?"

"Yes, often. He is a friend to us all. He was like a father to *me*," answered the Priest, his face lighting up.

"How was that?" asked Eustace, interestedly.

"Sit down, I will tell thee." And Eustace sat down in the bright moonlight streaming through the horn window. "My father was one of King Stephen's men," began Stephen. "He fought much, and was sorely wounded. He managed to creep back to the little croft at Tenterden, the only place left us of our old manor. My mother was there, with my sister and myself. He never got well: he had pain, and could not walk, and he died when I was but seven; GOD rest him." Eustace crossed

himself, and waited till the other resumed. "My mother laid claim to the little place for me, but my lord of Tenterden wanted the cottage for his huntsman, and we had to go. The Archbishop Becket was then in the household of Archbishop Theobald, and my mother appealed to Canterbury. His secretary, Thomas à Becket, saw us, and helped us. The Lady Sybilla was kind to us, and begged of Sir Tristan to give us a hut. He owned Tenterden, thou wottest. I was the pet of the Lady Sybilla; but one day Sir Tristan came in vexed, and he threw me down, and I have never walked well since. So my lady got me my benefit of clergy, and I became exorcist, so I was passed upwards."

"And thy mother and sister?"

"My mother is feeble, and lives with the huntsman in our little croft. My sister is, I know not where."

"Is she in a convent?" asked Eustace.

"I know not. She was very fair to see, with golden hair and blue eyes. One day a young Gascon knight came to the castle. He saw my sister, who was my lady's waiting maid. He admired her, but she was modest and gentle. So one night he went away, and—took my sister with him—to Normandy. He had—stolen her—as she fetched water—for the lady."

Eustace coloured hotly at the broken words, and scarcely restrained passion told of the sorrow and horror of the tale. "He was no true knight," he said, sharply.

"Nay," answered the Priest, with a sarcastic ring in his voice, "she was but a waiting maid. But my lady was grieved: she did what she could for me. But my lord, Sir Tristan, laughed, and said we were honoured. Honoured!" went on Stephen, his tone changing to bitter sorrow. "Honoured! when we were injured in mind, body, and estate, too. But there! go, I can talk no more of it."

And Eustace, humbled and vaguely guilty, went, leaving the Priest on his knees.

CHAPTER III.

"I will die a hundred thousand deaths,
Ere break the smallest parcel of this vow."
SHAKESPEARE.

THE dim winter sunlight was striving to shine through the snow clouds on a blustering, bitter day in the following January. It shone fitfully on the gorgeous assembly in the hall at Clarendon, where King, Archbishop, nobles, and the heads of the great monasteries had met to promulgate the new Constitutions against which Becket had such a vehement, and partially well-founded, dislike. The King, with his red-golden hair, the tight curls of which nearly hid the golden circlet he wore, stood in front of his chair of state; his features, handsome in outline, set gravely and severely; his muscular frame enveloped in an ermine-bordered mantle. His hands lay lightly on the table in front of him, and they were ugly and scored with many a cut and scratch, and marred by his trick of biting his nails. But he looked dignified despite his simple green cloth dress, over which the mantle was drawn closely for warmth. On his right sat Becket, in his scarlet robes, a frown of perplexity on his face. Behind him stood Godfrey, his cousin, in his ordinary black

scholar's gown. The Bishops of Salisbury, London, and Winchester, the mitred Abbots of many a powerful house (more powerful than the Bishops), nobles and knights sat round in grim silence, till the King spoke. He put before them, he said, Constitutions that embodied old customs to which all in the realm had conformed willingly. Other newer rules were of necessity to check certain abuses that had grown up in the spiritual power. He called on the Clerk of the Court to read the scroll. The King took his seat while the clerk, an ecclesiastic, of course, read them in a tone half of bravado, half of subservience. All eyes turned to the Archbishop, who was, however, too politic to let his expression show his anger, and he sat with his eyes on the ground. The important Constitutions, aiming specially at Becket's power, were: (1) Questions about advowsons, and the right of presentations to livings were to be decided in the King's Court. Eustace de Eynsford, in attendance on his father, met Godfrey's eyes, and Sir William smiled grimly. (3) Clergy accused of crime were not to be further protected by the Church, after conviction in an ecclesiastical court, read the clerk.

"That I cannot sign," broke out the Archbishop, sharply, then recollecting himself, he leant back with a gesture of contempt.

Nothing more broke the reading till the twelfth: "The rents of archbishoprics, bishoprics, abbacies and priories to go to the King during vacancy. The vacancies to be filled by election by the clergy

of the King's chapel, with the consent of the King and Council."

The Archbishop started forward, but did not speak.

"Sons of villeins are not to be ordained without consent of their lords," ended the clerk, and then paused.

There was a dead silence, till the King spoke. "These are my new Constitutions, my lords and knights. Do you agree to them?"

"We agree," came the almost unanimous answer: the clerical party hating Becket personally for his stern, abstemious habits and great power, and willing to side against him from sheer jealousy. For otherwise, the new Constitutions touched most of them severely.

"And, my Lord Archbishop, what is thy opinion?" asked Henry, turning to him.

Becket rose, stood for one instant looking over the assembly waiting still as death for his answer. "My Lord King," he began—when Henry stopped him.

"Remember," he said, slightly lower, "Thomas à Becket, we have been friends."

Becket flushed crimson, and choked. The appeal from the man he loved weakened him, and his Southern impetuosity coming forward, he cried, "I *will* sign, my Lord King."

Henry grasped his hand with a visible relief, and all present shouted at the King's victory. "Oh, I *knew* thou wert my old friend still," cried the King.

"Bring us the roll, Sir Clerk." Henry wrote with difficulty his "*Henricus Rex*," and his seal, the real authenticity of the document, was added; then it was laid before Becket. He stood, the glow out of his face, and a sad perplexity there instead. "Sign, my Lord Archbishop," said the King.

Becket took up the reed, then paused—then dashed it down. "I *will* not sign—I dare not," he cried.

"Dare not! This is strange," said Henry, sternly.

"No! my Lord King, I *dare* not," said Becket, his dark eyes burning intensely. "It would touch the honour and power of Holy Church."

"The Church against the law," muttered a baron close by.

"The Church stands before the law," answered Becket, firmly.

The King sat silent, but not impassive. At last he thundered out, "Go, Thomas à Becket, and pray the saints for wiser judgment. Be thankful thy office saves thee."

Becket, white as death, bowed to the King, and stalked down the hall in ominous silence, Godfrey following, glancing defiance on the crowd of menacing, or sullen, or discontented faces. Only the young Squire Eustace de Eynsford looked with friendly eye, and Godfrey was much inclined to include him amongst those who were driving his cousin to desperation. Becket made up his mind to leave England, and yet it was months before he did so. No one would aid him in his flat refusal to

obey the civil authority, whom, he contended, had no business to interfere in matters ecclesiastical. Nor had they, for it was not a State Church.

He retired to Canterbury, where he remained in dignified passive silence, though the Constitutions became law, despite his protest.

CHAPTER IV.

"Still to vindicate the right,
Is a rough and thankless game;
Still the leader in the fight,
Is the hindmost in the fame."

HOUGHTON.

KING Henry sat over the fire in the Castle of Northampton. That day had been the final downfall of the contumacious Archbishop. Through the Council the King had demanded of Becket an account of all the receipts and expenditure of all the bishoprics and abbeys administered by him for the King. This meant ruin, and, as Becket anticipated, his death also, though that had not come yet. Henry's red brows were knitted, his stern face set; he was very angry, and therefore inclined to be cruel. He was alone except for one attendant, who stood discreetly at some distance. The silence was unbroken until the entrance of Eustace de Eynsford, now one of the King's body squires. He stood waiting his master's pleasure. Presently the King turned round. "Is de Eynsford there?" he asked.

"Yes, my liege," answered Eustace, advancing with a bow.

"Well, how goes it? What does the Archbishop?

Hast thou seen his malapert cousin—how call they him?" asked the King, irritably.

"My lord," stammered Eustace, "the Archbishop is making a feast."

"What!" thundered the astonished King. "Feasting to-night?"

"Yea, my lord. He left the Council chamber, and immediately sent out messages to the poor and mained, for a banquet. They are feasting, with the Archbishop at the high table," answered Eustace, with an irrepressible smile.

"By S. George! this is the strangest thing I have ever heard. A man degraded, penniless, to make to himself a feasting. Surely it passes all else. What is the reason, thinkest thou, Eustace?"

"I know not, my lord, save perchance he has lost his friends; he thinks to purchase the friendship of the poor," said Eustace, diffidently.

"Oh! was that it?" muttered Henry, and relapsed into silence. Eustace stood waiting for further orders, till the King spoke again. "Go, Eustace!" he said, "find out more, and come and tell me ere I sleep. If Sir Aubrey bar thy way, say that I bid thee come. Now go!"

Eustace obeyed: taking up his cloak from the ante-room, he pulled the hood over his head, hiding his face completely. The October day had closed in, and he passed as quickly as he could through darkness, and over ill-kept streets, to the Archbishop's house. Light streamed from the cracks of wooden shutters, and bursts of merriment came from the

hall. The door was open, and in the ruddy glare several people moved about the courtyard. Unseen, Eustace could see all that was going on. He noticed presently that two figures were crossing the court obliquely, as if from another entrance. They passed him close, but, like himself, were so wrapped in cloaks, that it was difficult to recognise them, though he thought one looked like Godfrey à Becket. Following the pair he was led, by devious ways, to a large house just on the outskirts of the town. A small door in the wall admitted them to the courtyard, and Eustace found to his joy the lock had not caught; afterwards he opened it cautiously, and peeped through. What he saw was curious. A large fire burned on a stone hearth of a good-sized hall. A small, narrow courtyard alone separated Eustace from the wide-open door, on the steps of which three figures stood. One facing Eustace, who had crept inside the door in shadow, was a broad-shouldered, tall man with rough-looking hair. Eustace could see where his shoulders stood out, and the light caught the waves and tumbles of hair. The other two were those Eustace had followed.

"What fearest thou, my lord?" said the deep voice of the master of the house.

"I fear the rage of the King. I come to thee to aid my escape. I have finally withdrawn my consent to those Constitutions," answered the elder of the others, and Eustace felt sure of who he had followed; it *was* Becket and Godfrey.

"Withdrawn again, my lord?" said the other, reproachfully.

"Aye, good friend. Aid me and my cousin here to fly, and appeal to his Holiness. I am weary of these contentions, yet my conscience will not allow me to tamper with the Church committed to my care in England." There was indeed a weary sound in the voice that gave Eustace a throb of compunction.

"Come in, my lord, and rest. Ere dawn my horses will be ready, but sup and sleep first, my lord." With that the figures disappeared, and the great doors clanged, and were bolted.

Eustace remained in the corner, thinking. He had no longer any doubt but that the Archbishop meant to go to France, and thence to Rome. The question was, ought he to go back and tell the King at once? If he did, would the King stop the departure? And if so, would not the jealous, hasty barons and knights, whose hands were ever on their swords, do some damage to the man they so bitterly hated? Yet the King had distinctly told him to go back when he had found out anything. Which was right: to run the risk of the Archbishop's capture (and he sincerely cared for him), or risk the King's displeasure, nay, rage. He had played the spy, in itself an unenviable thing, and therefore he felt the more bound to go back as he had virtually promised to do. It seemed some time, but probably was a very short one, before he made up his mind to return, and crept to the door. To his dismay it was fastened; he had not heard the lock catch. It was

very dark, and Eustace could barely see, much less undo, the heavy fastenings. Besides, was anyone about? Of that he was not long left in doubt, for a hand was roughly laid on his shoulder, and a voice said, "What art thou doing?" Eustace's hand was on his sword, but it was caught. "Answer!" said the same voice, and Eustace dimly saw the figure of a man, apparently of servant class.

"I came to see thy master," said Eustace, making up his mind to a bold stand.

A scornful laugh followed, and the flare of a torch revealed his captor, a servant of low degree. "Here, Pierre, come and see," he cried, in the mixed Anglo-Saxon Norman-French used by the lower classes. A lithe young Gascon appeared, and between them Eustace was conducted up to the great hall, where a blaze of light greeted them.

"How now, churls? Whom have ye?" asked the master.

"A doughty young squire, who would see thee, Sir Knight," growled the man.

"Touch him no further. Go!" was the order, obeyed instantly.

Eustace looked up. The hall was of stone, with groined roof. A fire roared on the open hearth, and torches were in sconces on the walls. A group were round the hearth; in a carved chair sat the Archbishop, still in the dark cloak. He looked startled, weary and worn. By his side stood Godfrey, clad in the ordinary dress of a gentleman; he was glaring at the unwelcome visitor furiously.

Opposite them sat the knight and a young girl. He was not of pure Norman-French origin: his colouring was ruddy golden, his stature that of the old sea-kings. She was a pretty, slender, frightened-looking girl, not much more than a child, obviously his daughter.

"How, who art thou?" asked the knight, turning round.

"The son of a knight, of the degree of a squire," answered Eustace, temporising.

"Do not evade me, Sir Squire. Thy name?

"Eustace de Eynsford, son of Sir William de Eynsford, and one of the King's body squires.

"Why dost thou wish to see me?" asked the knight, sharply.

"I know not who thou art, or why thou askest me questions? I answer no stranger, save by this," said Eustace, trying a little bluster by touching his sword.

"A belted knight may ask what he will of a squire. Where didst thou enter?"

"At the postern."

"The postern!"

The knight and his guest looked at each other, and the latter spoke. "Pardon me, Sir John, I know this youth well. Small reason to guess why he came here. He saw, and followed us. Was it not so, Eustace?"

"Yea, my lord," murmured he, colouring crimson.

"Who sent thee—thy father?"

"No, my lord."

"Then who was it? Out with it?" demanded the knight, sharply. Eustace was silent.

"Answer, on thy obedience to a knight," demanded the other.

"I will not," said Eustace, firmly. "I have no right."

"Thou hast no *right* to be here playing the spy, I could have thee in ward."

"Do so, Sir Knight; I would then be saved telling my tale till it be safe," blurted out Eustace.

"Safe! Then it was the King sent thee," cried the Archbishop.

"Yea, my lord."

Becket was silent a moment, then looked up and spoke. "Eustace de Eynsford, go thy way. Thou art loyal and true to thy master. None shall harm thee here, eh, Sir John?"

"As thou wilt, my lord," growled the other, huffily.

"Then go, Eustace, say what thou wilt to the King, only tell him that Becket, the man, would die rather than disobey him; but that the Archbishop would die rather than obey him."

Eustace dropped on his knees, kissing the hand held out to him. "My lord," he said, chokingly, "forgive me, I was ordered to come, I could not help me. Give me thy blessing ere I go."

"Willingly, my son." The Archbishop crossed the young man's brow—adding, "Go in peace Give the King my message."

Eustace bowed, but did not speak again. The knight called one of the squires, who conducted him to the great gates and out into the raw, damp evening. He had been longer than he had intended; it was, he decided, too late to go to the King, so he crept off to his own pallet bed feeling very much ashamed of himself.

The next morning he presented himself to the King, who received him with a black brow. "Well, Sir Squire? So thou thoughtest it not needful to obey my command," was his greeting.

"Sire, it was late ere I returned," answered Eustace, briefly.

"I bade thee come to me, *without* limit of time," was the cold rejoinder.

Eustace was silent: he knew the King was unjust, for he never would have been admitted at nine o'clock at night on any pretext, save with the royal signet. "If I have displeased thee, my lord, I am very sorry," he answered, meekly, after a pause.

The red brows softened a little. "Ah! What didst thou find out?" asked Henry, more genially. Eustace looked round at those standing by. "Come with me alone," said the King, noting the glance, and led the way to an inner room. When he had seated himself, Eustace, standing before him, told his tale, ending with the message. The King slowly repeated the words, "'Becket, the man, would die rather than disobey the King; but the Archbishop would rather die than obey him.' Strange it is so," he muttered. After another minute or two of silence

Henry said suddenly, "Now, who was the knight who took him in?"

"I know not, my lord," answered Eustace, glad that he could so speak, for Henry's wrath was cruel.

"He has harboured a traitor."

"A what, my lord?" said Eustace, rather hotly.

"Ah! thou likest not the term. Tell me now, who is the head of this realm?"

"Thou art, my lord," said Eustace, rather surprised.

"And by what right am I so?"

"Because thy mother, the late Empress, on whose soul may GOD have mercy (and Eustace crossed himself, the King lifting his cap and doing the same), was true Queen of England, and thou followest her by right, my lord."

"That is so; how was this Becket made Archbishop?"

"By thee, my lord."

"Do not the scholars say the King is supreme overlord, above all others?"

"Yea, my lord." Eustace was getting puzzled at all this.

"And are not those bound to him, to obey him?"

"Yea, my lord."

"And ought not gratitude to bind more than duty?"

"I trow so, my lord," said the young squire, now seeing the drift of the questions.

"Then," and the king smiled triumphantly, "if the man is ingrate and disobedient in office, wouldst thou not call him a traitor?"

"Not always, my lord," answered Eustace, with daring boldness, "only if——"

He paused, for the King stamped his foot. "Bah!" he said, with angry scorn. "Go! by S. George, thou must learn wiser counsels. Go and learn them to-day; thou needest not come near us again till to-morrow."

Hurt and grieved, but neither ashamed nor dismayed, Eustace bowed and withdrew, determined still more in his personal love of the recalcitrant Archbishop.

CHAPTER V.

"The King, prevailing, made his realm I say.
Swear to me thou wilt love me: ev'n when old,
Grey-haired, and past desire, and in despair."

TENNYSON.

THE Archbishop of Canterbury was an exile, certainly not in obscurity. In France he was a hero and a martyr in will, and, although he endeavoured to live quietly, his advice was sought by numbers of people. Besides this, he was in constant correspondence with England, and he spent hours in private prayer and meditation, as well as the canonical hours. Godfrey was his constant attendant: and he spent his time in study of Latin and French, and, moreover, in playing the lute, and in the proper use of weapons. He had now made up his mind not to be a monk, and so his cousin allowed him to receive the usual secular education. Becket lived in the Cistercian Abbey of Pontigny, and Godfrey was allowed to come and go as he pleased. He lodged just outside the abbey. He had grown into a tall stripling of nearly seventeen, a man in his own and in everyone else's estimation in those early grown-up days. He was of grave, steadfast face, and looked far more than his age.

On Ascension Day, 1166, the Archbishop excommunicated John of Oxford, Dean of Salisbury, one of his bitterest foes, and a favourite of the King. That was a perilous operation, and Godfrey had need to look grave when he thought of the certain wrath of the King.

One June day the Archbishop was in his cell at Pontigny. It was the barest place: nothing but a rush mat to lie on, with a pillow of wood, a stool, a low chair, and a table, on which lay a crucifix and an open book. The Archbishop wore purple, and the ring of his see on his first finger. His eyes were as brilliant, but the tonsured head was grey, and the mouth wore a bitter, sad look. He was writing busily, and Godfrey sat on the stool, idly gazing into the cloister, where the bees were busy amongst the fragrant flowers. Godfrey wore a dark blue tunic, and cloth hose of the same colour. A plain steel and leather girdle bore an equally plain steel-hilted dagger. His sword lay with a brown mantle on the floor.

"Godfrey." The Archbishop's voice awoke him from his reverie. He rose instantly. "Godfrey, I am about to send thee to England with these letters."

"To England?"

"Aye, these haughty barons *shall* know who rules the Church. Even now that worldling, John of Oxford, cannot but own it. See! here is the lesser excommunication against the King himself."

"Against the *King?*" Godfrey started back in utter alarm.

"Wherefore not?" asked his cousin, coldly.

"Because—— O, my lord, do not so. They hate thee already," pleaded the other.

"The Blessed Master was hated, and shall they not hate His servant? Is the servant greater than his LORD?"

Godfrey bowed his head in silence, and after a pause was opening his lips to speak, when a lay brother entered, bearing a packet. "From England, father," he said, humbly.

"Ah!" The Archbishop seized it, and tore it open, for it bore the royal seal. Godfrey saw his face express incredulous amazement, flushing and paling alternately. "Saints and angels, this *is* too much!" he burst out at last, springing up as he spoke.

"What is it, my lord?" ventured Godfrey.

"Read. It concerns thee, too. Ah! are those who have sheltered me in my exile, and those of my own blood, to suffer with me for the right? It is *too* hard. Sweet JESU, grant me patience." He dropped on his knees, hiding his face. Godfrey was reading with horror and grief that choked him.

"To Thomas à Becket, Priest and Bishop, greeting.

"Know that by reason of thy excommunication on our worthy subject and spiritual father, John of Oxford, Dean of Salisbury, we have pronounced sentence of exile on all thy family, and have confiscated their lands and goods.

"Beware, Sir Priest, lest worse befall thee. Touching thy kinsman, Godfrey à Becket, now with thee, we would have him know that Alain, his father, being slain for resistance, the lands and dwelling of Bourne Episcopi are forfeit, and are granted to others more loyal than is the house of à Becket.

"Moreover, we shall banish from this our realm all of the Cistercian Order if thou remainest at Pontigny, as we hold they encourage rebellion and foster strife by harbouring a rebellious Priest.

"Given at our Court at Windsor, 1166."

Godfrey stood struck dumb with wrath and grief. His father dead, his birthright gone, his mother and sisters—where? All he could feel was, he was exiled in very truth, and a sick longing came over him for the sweeping downs, the fertile meadows and woods in which lay the little Kentish manor, with its tiny rough stone church, to which he had daily gone till he came to Canterbury.

At that point the Abbot of Pontigny came in, evidently in a great passion. The Archbishop rose, stiffly, from his knees, and took his seat with an air of rigid calm. "See here, my Lord Archbishop," exploded the Abbot, "I have had a letter from the head of our Order in England; he says the King will expel our Order if thou stayest here."

"I have heard, but I do not think the King will dare do it," said Becket, quietly, though the veins of his forehead stood out with the effort.

"Dare! Does King Henry stop at dare?" laughed the Abbot, sarcastically.

"My son, thou forgettest," said Becket, calmly. "I say, and I *know*, that King Henry will not do this. But I can leave thee, if thou desirest. I am thy pensioner." There was a proud ring under the calm words.

"Nay, not in so great a hurry," said the Abbot, calming down. "We will speak of it again after chapter to-morrow. But thy news is from England?" he added, seeing the letters and the preoccupied faces of the Englishmen.

"Yea, and bad. But enough! we will talk anon. I prithee, leave us now." The Abbot, not unkindly at heart, accepted the dismissal, and once more there was silence. Godfrey had never moved or spoken, he was standing leaning against the wall, apparently gazing out to the drowsy summer garden. "Godfrey, this is sore news for thee?"

"If I did but know how and why," stammered Godfrey, his hand on his dagger.

"*Requiescat in pace*," murmured Becket. "Masses shall I say for my cousin Alain, but, Godfrey, it *is* hard. *Why* is the right so hard to hold? And the King, whose friend I was, 'mine own familiar friend,' that *he* cannot see I must hold to my cause—the Holy Church. Thou forgivest me, boy?"

"Forgive! I have naught to forgive. It is for the right," said Godfrey, sadly.

"Now go—disturb me not. I must spread this before the LORD," said the Archbishop, abruptly,

and dismissed Godfrey, who took up his cloak and sword, and wandered into the mocking sunshine. His instinct led him to the church, where he knelt reciting the prayers for the dead. Then, quieted and less dazed, he turned to leave to go to his lodgings. At the great doorway he met a young knight.

A moment's hesitation, and then the quick eyes of the elder flashed recognition. "Godfrey à Becket?" he cried, gladly.

"It is true—and thou?" asked Godfrey, coldly.

"I am Sir Eustace of Eynsford. *Now* thou knowest me?"

Godfrey drew back. "How camest thou here?" he said, though he almost anticipated the answer.

"I came with the King's letters."

"Knowest thou what they contained?"

"Not much." Eustace was puzzled at the cold, steady voice, and white face of his friend.

"Then thou mayest not know I am landless and homeless?"

"Nay, I knew not. How chanced it?" cried Eustace, in such eager sympathy that Godfrey thawed a little.

"The King has exiled all our kin for the Archbishop's steadfastness, my land at Bourne Episcopi is forfeit, and my father is dead."

"Bourne Episcopi! Thy father!" stammered the other, with so much confusion that Godfrey cried:

"Thou knowest. Tell me, man! in mercy, tell me."

Eustace did not reply, but stood looking the picture of confusion.

"Thou knowest. *Who* has the land?" reiterated Godfrey.

"I—did not know it was thy father's," said Eustace, evasively.

"Thou! Is it thine?" asked Godfrey, suddenly cooling.

"Yes;" and Eustace looked his friend full in the eyes. "The King granted it to me."

Godfrey's fingers clutched his sword hilt, but he returned the look, as he said quietly, "My parents, my mother and sisters?"

"O Godfrey, ask not! Indeed I did not guess. There was resistance—he was slain. One of my escort set fire to the house, thy mother——"

Godfrey uttered a cry of horror. "Not that, too!" Sir Eustace nodded. He was not so shocked at the loss of life, as that it should have been his friend's family, and through his means. Godfrey stood gasping for breath, till he suddenly drew his sword, and sprang on the other. "Foul murderer! By the Hosts of Heaven, thou shalt die!" Sir Eustace had barely time to ward off the furious stroke, but he was infinitely the better swordsman, and quickly disarmed his opponent.

"Shall we bind him?" asked the squire who had run up.

"No, no! Go out of hearing. Gilbert, take this gentlemen's sword for the present." Godfrey had staggered back against the great stone Cross outside

the church door, and stood there glaring at the knight, who, however, went up to him. "Thou art mad, Godfrey, and I do not wonder," he said, sadly; "the King hath done thee sore ill. Believe me, on my honour, had I known it, *never* would I have set foot in Bourne Episcopi. Thy father died a brave man's death—I was not near enough to save him, for I was seeking the ladies; I thought thy mother was safe, but she returned to the house to seek her children. Thy sisters are safe in S. Eanswyth's Priory, Folkestone. The King thinks them dead also, but I saved them, and they are safely there."

Godfrey held out his hand, a deep flush on his drawn, hitherto white, face. "Forgive me," he said, huskily, "thou has been very good to us. But I was too horrified to think."

"I know, and think nothing. Gilbert, the sword. Take it, Godfrey; adieu, may we meet in happier days."

Godfrey shook his head, although he did not refuse to shake the hand extended to him. He went back to the church, where he knelt in a silent trance of unrealised sorrow. The monks came and went, the solemn psalm, canticle and response sounded, but the young man knelt on till Compline was ended, when his cousin fairly forced him from the church. Becket felt the load of his young squire's sorrow on him as the primary cause. Yet how unavoidable it was.

CHAPTER VI.

"Cromwell! I charge thee, fling away ambition,
By that sin fell the angels."

SHAKESPEARE.

FOUR years more had passed in busy defiance of the King by the Archbishop. He still lived at Pontigny, the King never having fulfilled his threat, and still Godfrey was with him. Eight years had passed since, as a boy of fourteen, he had stood as Boy-Bishop before the High Altar at Canterbury. Six of these had been turmoil and exile, and, though barely twenty-two, Godfrey à Becket wore the expression of a man who had suffered. This semi-monastic, semi-secular life had trained him into quiet reserve, strong devotional feeling, and, withal, a firm steady manliness, and skill in arms. He was trusted and loved by the Archbishop greatly. Terms of peace between the King and Becket were at last come to, and on December 1st, 1170, Becket crossed to Dover. His little boat was carrying the flag of the See of Canterbury, and as the white cliffs came nearer, they saw the shore black with people.

"See, they are waiting for us," said Becket to Godfrey. "We are nearly home."

"Home!" repeated he, "I have none."

"Where I am, thou art, Godfrey. But hark, they shout welcomes!"

A mighty shout rang out over the sea, and eager, willing hands hauled up the boat. The Archbishop, little expecting such a welcome, was utterly overcome by it. Mothers held their babes up for his blessing; old men knelt to receive it; young girls sang songs of welcome, and the solemn chant of the clergy permeated the rest; whilst above all rang the bells of Dover church, despite the royal castle frowning down on them.

Riding with his fingers raised in blessing, half-dragged off his mule by the crowd, his fiery eyes dimmed with tears, his voice choked with feeling, Becket went on his triumphal way. A triumph it was indeed, for as they rode to Canterbury, the villagers swarmed out, begging for a blessing; sobbing, praying with excitement. He had been their almoner, their protector from royal and baronial extortion, and his resistance to the Crown, rightly or wrongly, had been magnified by common report into a resistance of exaction.

They rode through Godfrey's own neighbourhood. Sir Eustace of Bourne, as he was now called, was away with the Court, and the people thronged to see, not only the Archbishop, but Godfrey, their real lord and master. They had no complaints: Sir Eustace was thoroughly just and fair-dealing, but he was not the old house. Five minutes halt enabled Godfrey to slip into the church. On the stones lay

two brass figures side by side, put there by Sir Eustace at Godfrey's request. The Latin inscription was above: "Pray for the souls of Alain à Becket, Knight, and Alicia, his wife, who both died on June 2nd, 1164. JESU, mercy."

Godfrey knelt bareheaded by the spot, kissing the cold brass, while his tears fell fast. "Forgive, I cannot do anything," he murmured, then rising and setting his face into more than its usual gravity, he left the church, and, remounting, rode on in dead silence, not even looking back at his native place, certainly not on the rebuilt manor house.

But these things did not tend to bring Becket back in a conciliatory spirit. He was exasperated by the violence done to his innocent kinsfolk, he was deeply hurt by the King's want of confidence, and he was prepared to stretch to the utmost the re-invested powers he rightly claimed. He was asked to absolve the Bishops who had taken part in the coronation of the King's son, early in that year, This had been a deliberate insult to Becket, for the Archbishop of York performed the ceremony, and the Archbishop of Canterbury had a right to perform it. Henry knew that Becket would never forgive this, or indeed that he ought to do so. He now absolutely refused to give the absolution: saying, that as he was not, as head of the Church ecclesiastically in England, asked to crown the Prince, he was not entitled to absolve those who took part in an illegal act towards Canterbury; unless indeed they submitted to him entirely in

future, which they were not prepared to do. "No," he said, "these Bishops must know that the Archbishop of Canterbury holds supreme power, and that I cannot, if I would, hold them guiltless of wilful disobedience. I know they wish me evil, but I must do my duty."

"It is shameful," put in the Prior of S. Augustine's Abbey, a great friend of Becket's. "Even if the *King* is ignorant, the Bishops know better."

"Policy, my dear Prior, policy. The King is the strongest seemingly, why offend him?" said Becket, with a sad smile.

"*Thou* hast done so, and he was thy friend as well as thy King," said the Prior.

A dark shadow crossed the strong, clever face. "He *was* my friend, I love him better than any else earthly. But I cannot obey him in this."

"Canst thou not conciliate him?" ventured the Prior.

"Get thee behind me, Sathanus," exclaimed the Archbishop, more vigorously than politely, "I cannot do more without betraying my trust." The Prior bowed, abashed. After a silence Becket went on, "Even now I am doing more. I am about to put under the ban of Holy Church those haughty barons who have taken the King's heart from me."

"My lord, thou wilt not!" gasped the Prior, aghast.

Becket nodded. "I will," he replied, with a laugh, "they cannot hate me more."

"But, my lord, thou dost not know the violence of these men of war."

"I do. But now they *must* submit and humble themselves." There was a ring of exultation in Becket's voice which was not belied by his words. Sad indeed was it that the ignorance and imperiousness of the nobility had driven so proud a man to extremities, and to assertion of himself, rather than his position, and the Church he really conscientiously wished to serve.

Godfrey, in the meanwhile, had left his cousin, and had gone to visit Sir John de Mercier, to whose house they had fled at Northampton when they had left England. He was a staunch friend of Becket's, and Godfrey was the bearer of letters to him, bidding him come to Canterbury after Christmas.

Godfrey had ridden through London and on to Northampton as quickly as winter travelling allowed. He found Sir John not much altered, but his daughter had grown a stately young maiden, who received him graciously. Sir John entreated him to remain a day or two, and he, thinking he was not needed by the Archbishop for a few more days, agreed willingly enough. Margaret de Mercier listened eagerly to the stories Godfrey told her of her hero-Bishop: for so Becket was in her girlish eyes. One evening the supper was over, and Sir John was dozing after it by the fire. The servants were grouped in the darkest ends of the hall over their ale, or gone in the kitchen, and the young

people sat over the blaze. She in her dark-red flowing robe and long hair bound back by a band of gold, he on a low stool, the light flashing on his sword hilt and dagger, and lighting more than he knew of his grave, steady face.

"Thou goest to-morrow?" said Margaret, timidly.

"Yea, lady, back to Canterbury. Christmas is coming, and the Archbishop will need me."

"Thou art glad to be in England again for Yule-tide?" asked she, interestedly.

A sudden memory made the young man's lips tighten before he replied. "It is the same to me whether I am in England or France, I have only my cousin, the Archbishop."

"Thou toldest me, I mind, of thy home once, years ago," began Margaret, but he stopped her.

"Yea, fair lady, but that is over; didst thou never hear that the King banished all the Archbishop's kinsfolk in revenge? My father was his cousin, and our lands were granted to Sir Eustace de Eynsford, once my friend; my father resisted the claim, and was slain on his own hearthstone. The house was set fire to, and my mother was burnt; my sisters were sent to S. Eanswyth's Priory, on the coast. One is now dead, the other professed, so—I am alone." He had spoken rapidly and hardly.

She held out her hand in pity. "O forgive me," she cried, "I knew not this before, I *do* feel for thee." Her eyes filled with tears, his were fixed on the fire.

Then he looked round at her. "I thank thee,"

he said, simply. "Grieve not for me. It is an old tale now."

"May I not think of thee, then?" she asked, sadly.

His colour flushed red. "If thou wilt think of me, sweet lady, I shall be happier. Such thoughts as thine must help a man," he answered, fervently.

"I fear thou art lonely, Godfrey, I would comfort thee," she said.

Godfrey bent his head, till his lips touched her fingers. "I am no knight yet," he said, "but I am *thy knight* now and always."

She looked up considering him. "And thou, so strong, so brave, thou canst not wish to be thus to a convent maid as I have been. I am not worthy," she said, humbly.

He smiled at her simplicity. "Convent-bred thou mayest be. So am I, Margaret. I was sent to Canterbury at the age of ten years. But I could not enter the priesthood. It seemeth all plotting, and it is hard to be loyal to the King and to Holy Church."

"And so thou wilt be knighted?"

"I have done naught to deserve it. I am landless, and an à Becket; that is enough now," he said, bitterly. "I have naught but what the bounty of my cousin gives me, I have not a bezant of my own."

"I have money, wilt not thou ask my father?" she said, shyly.

"Thy father!" he cried. "Nay, fair one; my own sword will win my way, and when once again I

am beholden to no man I will—may I?—come here again."

His voice had changed and softened, and she answered, "Come, Godfrey, when thou wilt."

"Thou givest me hope, comfort, Margaret—my Saint Margaret," he murmured. "I have someone to think of me."

A prolonged grunt made Godfrey start, as Sir John awoke, and he had to collect his wits to discuss the political situation. Next morning he rode off from Northampton, bearing with him a dainty knot of ribbon as a token from his ladylove.

CHAPTER VII.

"Sad were their days on earth,
Mid hate and scorn,
A life of pleasure's death,
A death forlorn.
Yet blest that end in woe,
And those sad days,
Only man's blame below,
Above, God's praise."

S. J. Stone.

TORRENTS of rain detained Godfrey in London. He lodged at the White Hart Hostelry, and knowing nothing of London, was not ill-pleased to walk about and see something of it. The weather had improved, and he had planned his start, when he met his friend Sir Eustace. He was grave and preoccupied. "Thou here!" was his greeting.

"I am going back to Canterbury to-morrow; whither goest thou?" asked Godfrey.

"To Windsor, to the King. Wilt come with me?"

"I!—with thee?"

"Godfrey, I *must* speak with thee. My errand brooks no delay. But I would warn thee of the danger for the Archbishop. Knowest thou his latest deed?" Eustace put his hand on the other's arm.

"No, indeed," said Godfrey, startled.

"He has excommunicated the barons who oppose him. I am sent from them to tell the King. My father is amongst them. It means worse, Godfrey."

Godfrey knew well what the significant hint meant, and his heart stood still. "But I must not tarry. I must go to Canterbury," he cried, wildly.

Sir Eustace was anxious to save his friend, for he had a foreboding of the forthcoming events, so he said, persuasively, "Nay, but perchance the King may relent. If thou camest with me he would send a message by thee. Hast thou a horse?"

"Aye, at the inn."

So soon the pair were on their way to Windsor, where Eustace easily gained admittance for them both, as he was still in the household. He also now, as a landowner, had a position, and, moreover, he possessed land in right of his wife, a considerable heiress. He was willing to give up Bourne to Godfrey, holding it on spur rent only, and so he told him as they rode down together. Godfrey's heart beat at the thought, but still more on his arrival at the mighty Castle of Windsor, then so sturdy and strong in its compact vigour. Christmas revelry was not yet over, and the hall was ablaze with light. Music sounded during supper, and Godfrey was well-placed at the squires' table, for as yet royalty was but the overlord of the feudal nobility, and but little ceremony was exacted beyond what went on in every castle in the land.

The King looked heated and vexed: his red brows lowering ominously as he gave short answers to his

WINDSOR CASTLE.

"Godfrey's heart beat . . . still more on his arrival at the mighty Castle of Windsor, then so sturdy and strong in its compact vigour."

Page 204.

son, who sat as his equal at the table. Eleanor of Aquitaine was away in Guienne with her son's young wife. He was a tall, handsome lad of fifteen, already crowned King. Becket had been his tutor, and he was fond of him: it was due to his words that the Archbishop had returned from Pontigny. But he could not prevent his father and tutor falling foul of each other, but he was even now pleading for the restitution of some of the funds the King had taken during the quasi-vacancy of the see. But Henry was in no melting mood, and he returned but slight answer. He noted Sir Eustace's return, and after supper sent for him. "Well, Sir Eustace. Thy news?" was his greeting. The King sat by the fire, young Prince Henry standing by him.

"I am come from my Lord Leicester in London, my Lord King," was the answer, as the knight bent his knee before his King and master.

"Ah, well! and what saith he?" asked Henry, sharply.

"He is ill at ease, my lord," said Eustace, evasively.

"Sick is he? Nay, for but yesterday he sent to me. Thou knowest something more, Sir Knight. Speak!"

"My Lord King, the Archbishop has excommunicated my Lord of Leicester and those who are with him, including my father," said Eustace, steadily, though he quailed a little.

The King started to his feet, crimson with rage, gasping and choking in the effort to speak.

"Sir, father, be calmer," entreated Prince Henry, soothingly. "Perchance there is excuse."

"Excuse, thou vile son! To excuse a paltry Priest who dares to oppose *me*," stuttered Henry. Prince Henry had the coolness of temper of his mother, so he did not answer, though his eyes flashed. "Where —where is this Becket?" said the King.

"I know not, my lord."

"Then who can tell me?"

"There is one of the Archbishop's kinsmen with me. He would know, my lord."

The King signed his approval of Godfrey's admittance, and he was ushered in, with his usual imperturbable expression and a low bow.

"Come hither, and tell us thy name," said Prince Henry, courteously.

"Godfrey à Becket, my Lord Prince," was the answer, in as polished Norman-French as the Prince's own.

"Art thou Norman or English?"

"Norman, my lord," said Godfrey, rather hurt.

"Thou art of gentle birth. Hast thou land?" continued Prince Henry, catching the change of tone.

"No one of the à Beckets has land *now*, my lord. I once had," said Godfrey with a sharp glance at the King, who did not speak, only fidgeted, as he sat shading his eyes with his hand.

"Thou art with the Archbishop?" continued Prince Henry.

"Yea, my lord." Godfrey was getting cautious, he knew not what was coming.

"Where is he, then?"

"At Canterbury, I believe, my lord."

"Dost thou know of this—this excommunication against my faithful barons?" burst out the King, looking up.

"I knew nothing of it, sire, till I came here," answered Godfrey, honestly, looking the furious King straight in the face.

"That is *not* so. Do I not understand that you à Beckets have vowed vengeance for my just acts? Thou liest, Sir Squire, to shield thy name, but it will not serve thee." The King's voice had reached a scream as he sprang up again, and Godfrey went very white.

"My lord," he answered, haughtily, "had any man but my King called me a liar, he would have answered for it. None of us had vowed vengeance, even I, who have lost father, mother, and home in our exile. We *are* loyal to the King, but my cousin, the Archbishop, holds that his duty to the Church and her rights comes first, before his duty to thee, my lord. But, oh! he loves thee, and it breaks his heart to withstand thee. My lord, see him, speak to him again, and he would serve thee gladly, as his conscience will allow." Godfrey spoke strongly, with a break of earnestness in his voice, and all were silent from sheer surprise.

The King was scarlet and white in ugly patches, his hand to his throat as if he was choking. Then he burst out, "Will *no* one rid me of this troublesome Priest? Bind this daring squire—here, Sir Eustace, Sir Humphrey, take him." He flung himself face

downwards on the floor, choking and gasping in a perfect agony of rage. Two or three attendants rushed forward to help him, for these paroxysms were not unknown, and Prince Henry gave orders the room should be cleared, giving a sign to Sir Eustace to remove his friend, for no one obeyed orders of the King in his rages.

"I never deemed thou wouldst say so much," grumbled the knight, as they reached his little room.

"Wherefore not?" asked Godfrey, coolly.

"Why, man, the King's rages are fearful!"

"I fear no man, not even the King," said Godfrey, quietly, though he was shaking from head to foot.

"Thou art a brave man, then. But—what is it?" for the other had dropped on to a seat, covering his face.

"What will they do? O Eustace, if they only knew how the Archbishop longs for peace with the King."

"Why does he not ask for it?" said Eustace, sensibly.

"He is sorely hurt."

"Well, the saints grant no harm befall him," said Eustace, fervently, adding, "Stay here, Godfrey, I will seek for our rere-supper." In a few minutes he returned with a cup of wine, and a very perturbed face. "Godfrey," he said, hurriedly, "Fitzurse, Morville, Brito, and Tracy have started for Canterbury. They were in the ante-chamber, and heard the King's last words. They mean the worst, I feel sure."

Godfrey sprang to his feet. "Quick, let me go. I *must* go," he cried.

"Stop!" began Eustace, but it was useless, Godfrey had rushed down the stairs, and had been directed to the stables. There he had saddled his horse when Sir Eustace arrived. "The gates are shut, thou *must* wait till morning," he said, breathlessly.

Godfrey yielded unwillingly, but he passed a sleepless night, till, at the first streaks of dawn, he was off riding for life or death to Canterbury.

And what was happening there that day? The knights, unarmed, forced their way into Becket's presence, and rudely demanded the repeal of the excommunication. Becket refused at once, and the knights withdrew, raging, and denouncing him as a traitor. Then the bell for Vespers began to ring, and Becket quietly called his cross-bearer, and, putting the crozier into his hand, bade him lead the way. The white, trembling monk obeyed, for the Archbishop wore a look of lofty calm. With quiet steps he reached the ascent to the choir, when there was a shout of "Where is the traitor?" and Becket caught the gleam of armour in the dark nave. The Vesper Psalms were being sung, quaveringly, till hushed by the savage shout repeated once more. Becket, with the same calm, turned away to the little Chapel of S. Benedict. The monks had fled, all but one, his friend the Prior. Then he spoke, "Here is the Archbishop, no traitor."

The knights paused: his figure looked stately in the dim light of the lamp by the Altar. They dared

not attack him, but they began hurling epithets at him, which broke Becket's composure, and he threatened them with further penalties. That was enough. Fitzurse sprang forward. His half-nervous stroke only knocked the Archbishop backwards, but the next sheered off his skull and then—it was nearly over. A gasping request for the safety of his servants and the monks (his friend was sorely wounded by his side), and the Archbishop fell forward, dead.

There was a silence: the insulting words, the clanging armour, the rattling sword-blades were quiet; it was an awful stillness, after the turmoil. Fitzurse looked shudderingly round, white as death, Morville and Brito turned away with a laugh that echoed weirdly, and Tracy, who had done least, burst into tears. Then a panic struck all four, and they hurried away as if already an avenging angel was scourging them for their deed of sacrilege and murder.

CHAPTER VIII.

"By that way which leads through night to light."
TENNYSON.

THE frightened monks had crowded back to the Cathedral bearing torches. Trembling, the Abbot had crept down, fearing at every step. All was silent and dark, save for the glimmer of the tapers at the shrines. In a long terrified trail they searched, till a simultaneous cry of horror burst from their white lips. In his richly-embroidered cope the Archbishop lay in front of the Altar of S. Benedict, the whole covering soaked through with his blood. The Prior was moaning feebly, as he half-sat against the Altar. The Abbot, strong man as he was, reeled with horror, and again a wail went up. But the Abbot raised his hand. "Woe to those who did this awful deed," he said, solemnly. "Sons, lift them hence."

The Prior was carried away, and they were preparing to lift the body, when the Abbot spoke again, "Open the great doors," he said. He was obeyed, and in the glare of torches he stood, with a face of indescribable horror and grief, overlooking a considerable crowd. The knights' hasty departure had given warning already. "Men of Canterbury,"

he began, "a black deed of murder and sacrilege has been done to-day. The Archbishop has been murdered by four King's men by the Altar of the blessed S. Benedict. A double sacrilege is this, for he was as one set apart, and our holy places are outraged. But he is a martyr: he died for Holy Church and her rights. Listen, people of Canterbury." The big bell began to toll, and the Abbot paused. No one but crossed themselves devoutly, while their lips formed the prayer.

Then the shout rang out, "Where are the murderers?"

It was fortunate for them they were probably scattered, riding for their lives in the darkness, now that the madness was over, bitterly repenting their wild deed. Before the Abbot could speak again a horseman, jaded and weary, pulled up by the steps, and Godfrey à Becket dismounted. "What is this?" he gasped, breathlessly.

The Abbot drew him back into the church, and the great doors closed behind them. "Godfrey, my son, the deed is done," said the Abbot, in breaking tones.

"Murdered! O holy mother of heaven! and I not there!" cried Godfrey, staggering back.

"Look, and listen," said the other, as the low sounds of choked weeping mingled with footsteps, as the monks bore their Archbishop's body away.

Godfrey stood with eyes dilated, then sprang forward. "Stop, let me see," he said. They lifted the fair piece of linen they had taken from the

Altar to cover the marred face, and Godfrey saw, and realised the truth. He was too stunned, too Norman by nature for demonstration: he only crossed the brow, and then put back the covering with a white, stern face, and lips set in a hard line that boded ill for any of his cousin's detractors. The Abbot led him passively away to his own house, made him eat and drink, and had the satisfaction of seeing him asleep ere Compline was sung.

But the next morning the storm of passionate feeling had broken all over the city, and from lip to lip, by all travellers the news flew that the Archbishop had been murdered in the Cathedral by the King's orders. For that was how the populace and ecclesiastics interpreted the deed. And the Archbishop lay in state for all to see. A steady file of people passed through, while the low chanting of the monks never ceased, and the great lights burnt round the bier. At its head stood Godfrey à Becket: a black cloak over his shoulders, his head bare and bent low, unarmed, and with an expression of haggard sorrow, for he was rigidly fasting.

The second day after the murder was one of dark snow-clouds, and the Cathedral was gloomy and very cold. Even Godfrey shivered as he stood there, till, too chilled to bear the strain, he moved away. His way led him past the Chapel of S. Benedict, still with the awful red stains on floor and Altar. He paused an instant, and an iron-ringed tread made him start by associations of the sound.

A young knight came hastily up and seized him. "Godfrey, what is this? Is it true?" gasped Sir Eustace de Eynsford.

"The King's orders," answered Godfrey, slowly, pointing to the bare and desecrated Altar.

"But that *thou* knowest is not so," said Sir Eustace, quickly. "But the rest?"

"Listen," and Godfrey held up his hand, as the low voices sounded from the choir.

Eustace crossed himself. "The people are mad with the King, and no wonder!" he said. "Let me come and pray for his rest."

So the two went into the choir: Sir Eustace, a tall, fine man in his fur-lined mantle over a dark-blue surcoat, his face flushed and perturbed; and Godfrey, almost equally tall, but thin and slight, his long black cloak closely drawn round him for warmth, his lips set hardly, his face very white and pinched with cold and grief. So the pair moved on, while curious eyes watched them. Sir Eustace took up the asperge, and sprinkled the body, then knelt a few minutes, Godfrey standing near him. The monks were chanting the "*Dominus refugium factus es nobis*," every word of which Godfrey had often sung in that very choir. "*Quoniam omnes dies nostri defecerunt, et in ira defecimus. Anni nostri sicut aranea, meditabunter.*"

"As a tale that is told," that was the earthly end of the hasty, ill-judged, but honest, sincere Priest and Bishop, now a martyr.

These, and many other like thoughts, surged through Godfrey's brain, for all he looked so impassive. Then Sir Eustace rose, and led the way out, Godfrey following mechanically. But then he roused himself, and led him across the cloister to a door leading to the Archbishop's rooms, where Godfrey also was now quartered. He admitted his friend into a little room, dusky, and with a dreary wind, a precursor of snow, whistling through the uncovered window. In silence Godfrey gave Sir Eustace a stool, which, with a straw bed and a table, was the only furniture. He himself stood by the window, not heeding the wintry blast that blew in, though his cloak had dropped from his shoulders.

"Godfrey," began Eustace, "now tell me about it."

"I know nothing. I was not there."

"Was it the knights who did it?"

"Yes. They returned at Vespers, and murdered him at GOD'S Altar," answered Godfrey, turning round for a moment.

"At the High Altar?" exclaimed Eustace.

"Nay, at that of the blessed Benedict. I reached here not long after. I would I had been here sooner," and Godfrey's voice changed a little.

"Would both I and thou hadst been there," murmured Eustace, sadly.

Godfrey held out his hand. "I thank thee," he said, simply.

"And now what wilt thou do?" asked Eustace, more cheerfully, as he squeezed his friend's hand.

"I do not know. Take service to fight, or join the Knights Templar," answered Godfrey, rather recklessly.

"Wilt be my squire, till thy knighthood?" asked Eustace.

"And go with thee to Bourne Episcopi? *Never!*" said Godfrey, fiercely. "Nay, take service against the King if I can. He who has murdered the man I loved, the man who was his friend, the man who was all I had to care for, or to care for me." And Godfrey turned sharply round, resting his head against the wall, but not before Sir Eustace had seen the storm of passion was breaking down the rigid self-control.

He waited a moment before he spoke again. "But what if Bourne Episcopi is thine again?"

"Mine? Never! Thy son's after thee," said Godfrey.

"I took it unwillingly. Gladly will I give it back, for the King will permit it."

"The King! Thinkest thou I would take a rood of land from the King as a bribe—a makeweight against his sin. Nay! We may be beggars, but we à Beckets are gentlemen and honourable." Godfrey's face was flushed with passion, and his eyes bright and shining.

"Well, Godfrey à Becket, I came in sorrow and sympathy, but the King is my very good lord, and I cannot brook these words," and Sir Eustace rose as he spoke.

Godfrey stood clenching his hands till the flush died away, leaving his face quieter than before. He

looked up with a faint smile. "Forgive me," he said, "I have felt a weight at my heart these awful days. Thou meanest kindly: if I hurt thee I take back my words. It is supper time, wilt go with me?"

"Willingly," answered Eustace, relieved at the apology, and Godfrey led the way with a brighter face than he had previously worn.

CHAPTER IX.

"The heart may burst, but may not break,
Heaven will not leave thee, or forsake."

KEBLE.

LIKE wildfire the excitement spread; at every market the news was discussed; at every monastery the brothers spoke of nothing else. The Chantry Priests sang their Mass for the soul of the Archbishop, and in every hovel, by wayside cross, in the woods, by the sea, rang the lament, "*Our* Archbishop is dead," and many were the bitter curses levelled against the King's men.

Thousands, in the bleak January weather, travelled to Canterbury, and knelt in the nave, as the Archbishop was laid to his rest with every honour possible for their excited brains to conceive. And afterwards the multitude went up to S. Benedict's Chapel, sobbing, praying, even kissing the blood-stained stones; the first Canterbury pilgrims trod the way which such countless numbers have followed, whose offerings made the shrine of S. Thomas a glory to all Southern England. Now, the hollowed stones of the steps alone attest to the truth of the story. Even then he was canonised by the vehement enthusiam of the people. And by the Altar knelt Godfrey,

unarmed, bareheaded, in one of those trances of devotion common in the middle ages. His face was drawn and ghastly (for he was rigidly fasting), withal he wore an expression of lofty ecstasy, perfectly natural to an overwrought imagination and strong devotional feelings on a depressed body, but unintelligible to our modern easy-going sensations. The crowds came and went: the passionate sobs, the threats, the prayers, the exclamations passed unheeded by him. At last there was silence: the crowds had gone, and, when the monks came in to sing Vespers Godfrey à Becket lay in a dead swoon on the stone steps.

He was very ill for weeks: flesh and spirit had been strained to the uttermost, and it was only his youthful, hardy life that kept him alive. But he struggled back into convalescence, a mere shadow of his old self, with an utter blank in his memory, and a desire for simple childish amusements.

He lay out in the cloister outside the infirmary, covered warmly, for February was cold, and watched with interest the birds and early insects. Or he played aimlessly with a piece of golden cord that caught the light and pleased him. He ate and slept the greater part of his days and nights away. In his delirium he had gone back to home-life, and re-enacted the murder in the Cathedral, being himself in some way prevented from helping the Archbishop. But all this was past, he was content now to be a mere child again.

One March morning he was standing by a window,

for he could now move about a little, and the Abbot entered. "Well, Godfrey, what art thou doing?" he asked, cheerfully. None of them thought but what the young man's brain had gone for good, so rudimentary was their knowledge of the human frame.

"I have walked hither," Godfrey announced, in the pleased tones of a child who had achieved something.

"That is well; thou art stronger now," answered the Abbot, in the same cheerful way.

"I am; see, father, is not the sun beautiful?" and Godfrey pointed out into the sunlit garden.

"It is a fair spring day. Now sit down, I will talk with thee." Godfrey obeyed, as he obeyed them all, with cheerful alacrity. "Now," went on the Abbot, quietly, "thou art going to the Cathedral to-day."

It had been settled to make one more attempt to rouse Godfrey à Becket before deciding what to do with him, and this was the beginning.

"The Cathedral!" A puzzled look came into his eyes. "O yes, they will want me to sing."

"To sing?" The Abbot in *his* turn was puzzled.

"Why, yes! good my lord. 'Tis for our Lady's Mass, and the Archbishop bade me come," said Godfrey, with renewed cheerfulness.

The Abbot shivered involuntarily: hardly three months had passed since that brutal murder. "Well, come with me," was all he said.

Godfrey put up his hand for the hood he had worn

with his chorister's gown, but dropped it again, puzzled once more. "My hood?" he said, with the first note of dawning perception in his voice.

"There is thy cap, that will suffice."

Godfrey smiled placidly, once more reassured, and the Abbot and a lay brother guided his feeble steps to the Cathedral. There, on a stone bench he sank gladly, but quickly rose, for he was late to sing already. They reached and crossed the choir (his two supporters very doubtful of their venture), and reached S. Benedict's Chapel, already covered with the offerings of those who daily came there. Godfrey paused. "Why?" he asked, breathlessly, "is it a pilgrimage?"

"Yes, to the—Altar of the blessed S. Benedict," said the Abbot, nervously.

"Oh! What know I of that Altar?" murmured Godfrey.

At that moment a brown-clad merchant came up, and, kneeling on the steps, laid a gold chain on the stones. Then, removing his hood, he began the "*Miserere*," followed by the prayers for the dead.

"Who is dead?" asked Godfrey, removing his own cap, and crossing himself.

"A friend of thine," answered the Abbot, bluntly. The experiment had succeeded, but he dreaded the next words.

"A friend of *mine!* Is it Eustace? He is my friend."

"Nay, a nearer friend. My son, the Hand of GOD has been heavy on thee," said the Abbot, slowly.

"Heavy on *me?* Oh! what do I know? Darkness, blood, here? Who?—what? O tell me!" and Godfrey gripped the Abbot's arm tighter, as his voice changed to one of wild questioning.

"'Tis thy cousin, the Archbishop," was the answer.

Godfrey uttered a cry that rang weirdly through the Cathedral, startling the sober, portly merchant to his feet, and then reeled back. The shock had deprived him of his slight strength. They carried him back to the infirmary, all expecting him to be ill again, but he did not suffer. The next day he sent humbly a message for the Abbot's presence, who came at once.

Godfrey was seated on the same stone bench, as on the previous day, but the garden was now not sunlit, but dripping from a rain storm. He wore no longer a childlike, happy face, but a quiet, rather sad one. "Thou art good, my lord," he began, standing as the Abbot appeared. "Is it true the Archbishop was murdered?"

"It is, my son," said the Abbot, pitifully.

"Who by?"

"I will tell thee, but sit." Godfrey sat down, his arm on the broad window sill, his head against his hand. Then the Abbot began, slowly and plainly, to tell him the whole story, sparing no pains to convey the truth; that he succeeded was shown by the deep sigh and silence, by which Godfrey received the news.

"And the knights?" he asked, after a pause.

"Sir Hugh de Morville has fled to France; Tracy defies the King in his own castle, for they are all outlawed; de Brito is in Normandy; Fitzurse has vanished, no one knows where."

"Justice, after it is over," sighed Godfrey, wearily. "And he was the King's friend. But I am tired; I would rest," he added, rising unsteadily. He stretched out one hand, and the Abbot made him, with kindly help, lie on his bed, where he buried his head in the cushions. The news had crushed him, and the Abbot stood looking at him with tears in his eyes.

After a long silence the Abbot spoke. "Godfrey," he said. The young man rose slowly, and sat up on the edge of his pallet bed, raising his eyes to the Abbot in silent questioning. "My son, remember it was the will of GOD," was all the Abbot could say in the face of such a mute question.

"*Fiat voluntas tuas*," murmured Godfrey. "Ask me not to feel it yet, my lord, for I cannot."

"In time thou wilt. And what are thy plans in future?"

Godfrey shook his head. "Take me in here," he said, "I can think of no other home."

"Wait," answered the Abbot, wisely, well knowing that once the depression of sorrow and weakness was over, the tide of life would make Godfrey think differently. He had no need to force men to join his already crowded community.

A hasty footstep came along the passage, and a fully-equipped knight entered the infirmary,

exclaiming, "Pardon me, my Lord Abbot. Art thou well enough to come with me to the King?" he added, to Godfrey.

It was Sir Eustace de Eynsford, and Godfrey held out his hand in greeting, saying, quietly, "Wherefore?"

"He wishes for thee. Why, man, thou hast been sick!" added Eustace, as he saw the thin, worn face and feeble limbs.

"Nigh unto death," answered the Abbot, sharply.

"Sooth, by S. George! but thou canst not travel," said Eustace, sitting down by the pallet.

"Why am I to come?" asked Godfrey.

"He wishes to learn the truth; O Godfrey, he bitterly grieves now."

"To learn the truth? Father, I will go; I *can* go," and Godfrey rose with sudden energy.

The Abbot looked him up and down: the gaunt, feeble man looked unfit for any exertion. "I doubt it," he said, dubiously.

"I can. It is the doing nothing that irks me so."

So Godfrey had his way, in so far that the next day he was allowed to go, riding on one of the easy-going mules of the Abbot. The King was at Eltham Palace—not more than a day's ride, but as Godfrey was to be spared, Sir Eustace divided the journey into two parts, so that it was barely five o'clock on the second day as they rode into the courtyard of the palace. The attendants and servants looked curiously at the visitor, who, it was rumoured, was the favourite attendant and relative of the now

martyr-Archbishop, and who was sent for by the King.

A knight met them. "The King is uneasy. Will thy friend come to him after supper?" he asked of Sir Eustace.

But Godfrey answered, "Most certainly."

The knight glanced at the weary face, so contrasting with the sharp tones, but he bade Godfrey follow him to a small room, where he ordered food and wine to be placed before him.

The needed refreshment brought colour back to his face, and the horn sounding for supper he was left alone to rest and change his travel-worn dress. He was glad of the quiet, for his head was still weak, and, after some time of rest, he made himself more fit for the King's presence. His was no common audience, and no common loss had he suffered, so although black was unusual, he had, by the Abbot's advice, provided himself therewith ere starting on his journey. So he arrayed himself in a black cloth tunic, belted with black and silver alternately, fastened together with silver chains. The collar of his shirt showing over his tunic was of plainly-embroidered linen, his hose were black, his leathern shoes black, guarded with silver. His dagger, a gift of his cousin, was of fine workmanship, Eastern in pattern, and his sword, simple and suitable to his squire's rank, hung on a steel chain at his side, and, when all was ready, he sat down and waited with outward calmness for the summons.

CHAPTER X.

"Vandregesil rode perplexed
To his monarch's dwelling,
Many thoughts his spirit vexed
In his bosom swelling.
Now, in presence of the King,
He his head is baring,
Whispered words go round the ring
Of his pride and daring."

THE summons came at last, and Godfrey followed the squire to the hall. There sat the King by the window: the setting sun lighting up his hard, rugged face, and red hair touched with grey. His attendants were few, and were lounging about, till they looked up, and signed their surprise at this interview. Godfrey stood two paces from the entrance, as the curtain fell behind him baring his head ceremoniously.

After a moment of intent study of his visitor's face, the King spoke. "Come here, Godfrey à Becket," he said, harshly. Godfrey obeyed with a bow. "Where hast thou been lately?" asked the King, sharply.

"I have been sick, my lord," answered Godfrey, quietly.

"Sick! Thou lookest so. What was it?" The

King was biting his nails in the ugly, but favourite fashion he had, and he looked up from the occupation.

"It was fever, my Lord King."

"Oh!" grunted the King. "Well, thou wast, I hear, with Becket, the Archbishop, rest his soul! in France. Tell me of his life there."

Godfrey obeyed. "He read, my lord, and studied, wrote letters, and taught me——"

"Wrote. Dost know to whom?" put in the King, hastily.

"I know, but I am not at liberty to say, my lord," answered Godfrey, firmly.

"Tush, man! it cannot harm him now," said the King, impatiently.

"Nothing can harm him now, the saints be thanked," said Godfrey, his cool, sad tones breaking on the other's vehemence. "But I am not justified in giving names of living persons, my lord."

Henry frowned, but the justice of the plea commended itself to him, and he went on more softly, "If thou wilt not give the names, tell me what did the Archbishop say when our mandate came that his kindred were banished?"

Godfrey paused, a darker shade crossing his face at the thought of that bitter day, and then spoke. "My lord, we were together when we heard it. He was grieved, especially that thou, his King and his friend, should have done that." Godfrey faltered, and stopped.

"Well," queried Henry, "why did he not write to me, and own that I, his King, was right?"

"He could not, my lord. He wept sore tears, but he dared not yield to the crown that which belongs to Holy Church. My lord, he loved thee well; it went sorely with him to withstand thee. But he died a martyr, and I—I have lost my only friend." Godfrey's voice had dropped lower as he went on.

"And thou hast no parents, then?" asked the King.

Godfrey looked straight into his King's eyes as he answered, though his voice was husky, "No, my lord. My father was under banishment, but he preferred to fight and die on the doorstone of his blazing home, where his wife, my mother, was burnt to death. My young sisters were rescued, and sent to S. Eanswyth's Priory. One is dead; the other took the veil."

The King quailed under the steady glare of those revengeful eyes, but he only asked, somewhat meekly for him, "And thy age, young man?"

"Twenty-three next S. Martin's Day."

"And thy home was, where?"

"Bourne Episcopi, my lord."

"Ah! 'Tis thine now, Sir Eustace," cried the King.

"My Lord King," and Eustace came forward from the gathering shadows, and knelt. "Thou knowest I am my father's only son, so I must in course of nature inherit Eynsford. The Lady Alicia, my wife, has broad lands of her own, so our babes will own much. My lord, grant me grace, and give back to Godfrey à Becket that that was his father's."

The King did not explode into an angry denial,

only said, uneasily, "How shall I know it will not be used against me and my son?"

"My lord, my life as a pledge of my friend's loyalty," answered Sir Eustace, with a chivalrous burst of generosity.

"Ah!" The King looked pleased at this impetuous burst. "Well, Godfrey à Becket, what sayest thou? Am I to take this pledge of Sir Eustace's? Remember, 'tis his life for thy loyalty."

"My lord, one question first, if I may?" broke in Godfrey, impulsively.

"Well! well!"

"My lord, pardon me, but thou didst not mean really to compass the Archbishop's death?" It was a daring question, even to a feudal King, so little above his subjects.

But Henry answered, vehemently, "By S. George, *no!* The villain knights took my angry words for sooth. NO; on my soul, NO, Godfrey à Becket."

"Then, my Lord King, I put all anger from me, and will be loyal, in so far as my duty to the Church permits."

"H'm! thou hast learnt thy lesson well, but I blame thee not. Thy wrongs are wrongs indeed, so kneel," said the King, drawing his sword. Three times he laid the flat of the steel on the young man's shoulders with the words, "In the name of the Holy Trinity, of S. Edward and S. George, I dub thee knight. Be truthful and brave, loyal to the King, constant to thy lady, protecting the weak and sickly. Arise, Sir Godfrey à Becket."

Godfrey rose, dazed and staggered by the sudden change of fortune, to receive Sir Eustace's warm congratulations. Then, with the promise of his lands once more, he left the presence.

The next day he rested, but the following he went off with Sir Eustace, carrying the grant of the manor of Bourne Episcopi with him.

Little need to tell how he was there welcomed, or how, when summer days made travelling possible, he went to Northampton, and was there wed in the newly-built Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

And then, of course, he and his wife lived happily in the manor house amongst the Kentish downs, bringing up their sons and daughters with the loyal patriotism of Kent, but above all, the loyal devotion to the Church in England, even before their love for the green fields and trees, the hills and valleys of their native land.

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